JOHN WARD M·D·

CHARLES VALE

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JOHN WARD, M.D.

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BY

CHARLES VALE

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PART I

ARCADIA

JOHN WARD, M. D.

PART I

ARCADIA

CHAPTER I

IT was nearly ten o'clock when Dr. Ward drove his car into the large, roughly-paved yard, bounded, on two sides of the oblong, by stables and vast barns, memorials of the farmers who had formerly lived profitlessly in the decaying house. The night was cold and dark: the drizzle that had floated down clammily throughout the day had changed into a heavy, oppressive downpour; rivulets twisted through the interstices of the uneven stones, splashed from the gutters and spouts, or fell, broken into showers, from the low roofs of the disused pig-sties.

He tooted the horn as he jumped from the car, which was coated with thick, clayey mud. Almost instantly, Marple appeared from one of the barns, which had been modernized and fitted up as a garage. The doctor, with a nod, turned away; but paused after he had taken a few steps.

"Marple?"

"Sir?"

"I may be called out again to-night. If so, I shall want the car."

"Very well, sir."

The man looked at the sombre sky, the weltering, desolate environment, and shrugged his shoulders. His master walked to the surgery, which had once been a kitchen, stored with cheeses, hams and flitches. After carefully washing his hands, he passed through a small inner room, arranged as a private consulting room, and thence into the hall, where he hung up his overcoat and hat. In the light of the oil lamp that depended from the ceiling, his face looked tired. That it was white, was merely normal: but there were shadows of fatigue which gave an illusion of middle age to the clear outlines.

His housekeeper, Miss Sands, came from the dining-room.

"Dinner is served, sir," she said jestingly, with the modulated voice of a gentlewoman.

"You have an extraordinary gift, Miss Sands," he returned gravely, "of anticipating my needs before I recognize them. I should not be at all astonished to discover that my slippers, cooked to perfection, are waiting alluringly by the fire to welcome me; or that a chicken, delicately browned, has at this moment been placed on the table, precisely as if you had known within three minutes, instead

of within three hours, when I should return, hungry, irritable, and ready to condescend to be petted into amiability."

"There would be many happier homes," she said with a smile, "if all men had the same idea of irritability that you have. As for anticipating your needs, or anything else, before you do, I sometimes think that God himself could scarcely do that." There was no levity in her voice as she concluded, but a note of simple wonderment; almost, of awe.

They went into the room. The slippers, at a discreet distance from the glowing fire, had absorbed heat without undermining their constitution. Ward put them on, discarding his wet boots with satisfaction, and feeling already less fatigued. Miss Sands removed a cover, and the anticipated chickens, delicately browned, diffused a subtle and stimulating odour.

With a feeling of complete resignation to the physical necessities of the body, — sometimes so irksome, — he began to transform things external into things internal. His habit was to dine, when he had no guests, in complete silence. A little silence is golden. Much silence is as radium.

When he had finished, he perceived that Miss Sands was perplexed. He elevated his eyebrows.

"I was wondering," she said, "whether you would prefer not to have coffee to-night?"

He lit a cigar. "You think it might keep me awake?"

"You have had a heavy day," she answered, "and you were out last night. It would be a pity to run any risk of not sleeping soundly, and soon."

He smiled, showing as much as was necessary of thirty-two white, even teeth, the pivotal, however, being slightly large. "There is no risk of my not sleeping soundly — unless I am awakened. I will take coffee, thank you."

He drank it, when it was brought to him, slowly. Miss Sands did not speak, and the silence within the cheerful room, lit by the glowing fire and the shaded lamps, was peculiarly soothing. His nerves, jarred by the anxieties of the day and the preceding night, recovered their normal tone: a sense of harmony, of complete accordance with the conditions of life, enveloped him. The sounds that obtruded themselves from without seemed irrelevant to the internal quietude. The patter and swirl of the rain, the soughing of the rising wind, were apprehended aloofly, impersonally.

"You will be glad to know," he said, at last, "that the operation was a great success — apparently. Of course, it is a serious case, and complications may ensue — dangerous complications. But Dr. Paxton was very pleased."

Dr. Paxton was one of the two specialists in the populous north-western part of the county. In what

precisely, each specialized, it would have been difficult to determine. But in all grave cases, it was the correct thing to call in for consultation, at a crisis, one of these white-haired, comfort-radiating practitioners. Ward had been hurriedly sent for in consequence of the sudden collapse of a boy of fourteen. His diagnosis was acute appendicitis. He had telegraphed to Dr. Paxton, and for a trained nurse; and had performed the operation with the complete approval of the old, wise man, who had been quite contented to administer brief advice, and the anæsthetic.

Miss Sands, gazing into the fire, murmured a commentary. "Poor Mrs. Harrington!"

Ward nodded. "She loves — the boy — naturally. It would be a terrible thing — if — anything happened." He spoke in segments.

"And you think —?"

He threw the end of his cigar into the grate. "I am too tired to think. I am going to bed." He stood up. "By the way, if I am called in the night —"

Miss Sands, who had risen also, looked at him with an expression in which disquietude was succeeded almost instantly by resignation.

"If you are called — in the night —?"

"And if I am not back by breakfast time in the morning, you will open my letters, and see whether there is one from Lord Daventry. I expect him

to-morrow, but he will, of course, send word, so that he may be met at the station."

Miss Sands repeated automatically, "— at the station."

Ward went on. "If there is a letter, let Marple take the dog-cart, and meet him. It will be fine in the morning, so an open trap will be all right."

Miss Sands turned suddenly, with a dull red flush in each cheek, and placed her hand on his arm.

"How do you know," she asked, "that your grandfather is coming to-morrow? Tell me. How do you know? Has he written already?"

Hesitating for a moment, Ward knitted his brows, and then answered, with a laugh, "Why, it 's his usual time, is n't it? The dear old man does n't show much ingenuity in varying his surprise visits."

Miss Sands considered the reply, carefully, and accepted it. "But how do you know," she insisted, "that it will be fine to-morrow? Listen to the rain. It seems as if it would never stop."

"Yes," said Ward lightly; "and listen to the wind. Do you hear it rising? It will soon be a gale; and it is blowing from the north-east. I don't think there will be a vast amount of rain in the morning. Do you?"

She removed her hand from his arm. "No," she said slowly, "I don't — if you don't."

He was sleepy. The top of his head, down to the

eyes, seemed curiously numbed. He said good-night, and walked upstairs.

Miss Sands went into the hall, and brushed the doctor's overcoat. Then, after placing a clean pair of boots by the side of the fire in the dining-room, she also retired.

CHAPTER II

AS there is method in the madness of certain people who regard the clear day with eyes adjusted to the twilight of thought, or the garish glare of passion, so, perhaps, there is madness in the method of others who strive steadfastly to control their deeds and their destiny. Many millions of years have passed since the beginning of the cosmic experiment, but the little fragment of the universe that we call our world has not yet been fitted perfectly for its daily function. Order and so-called law are but the temporary accommodations of a perpetual struggle. The everlasting hills merely mark the seconds on the dial of eternity. The first hour has not yet struck.

Ward folded his trousers and placed them in an empty press. Taking another pair from his wardrobe, he put them on a chair by the side of the bed, with the corresponding coat and waistcoat. Transferring the links and studs from the shirt that he had removed, to a clean one, he added this also to the collection. Underclothing went on the top. His watch he placed on a small hook near the speaking

tube, which was arranged conveniently to his hand, as he lay in bed.

Here was method — the method of a man resolved to be prepared, so far as possible, for whatever might come to him, normal or abnormal: for a sudden summons, an appeal from the known or unknown, a call for help in the darkness of the night, when time should be important and delay perilous.

As he came upstairs, he had turned on the hot water in the bathroom, at the opposite end of the landing. The tub was nearly full by the time that he was ready, and he bathed luxuriously by candle-light, boiling himself. While he lay in the water, soaking, the window-frames rattled as the storm shook them. The house, infirm but not yet exhausted, quivered with the sudden gusts or swayed with the longer and moaning surges. Though February had scarcely run through half its course, the spirit of March seemed loose, hunting havoc. The oppression of a deliberate, demoniac will for ruin hung heavily upon the night: the sense of sheer purpose, of lust for the wreckage of life, was unescapable and ominous.

He stepped from the bath, dripping, and dried himself with rough towels. The friction routed some of the languor of the body: the blood flowed warmly, and the brain, tired but stimulated, responded with an acknowledgment of satisfaction. He went back to his bedroom, knelt for a brief

prayer, and then, getting into bed, closed his eyes and waited for sleep.

He had left one night-light burning. Without opening his eyes, he was aware of the thin flame, so slight, yet dominating the shadows of the room. " As purity," he thought, " can illumine and conquer all the darkness of man's life."

The storm increased in violence. He listened, vaguely, knowing that somewhere pain and peril would pay tribute. The floating images, which so often come with the final witchery of sleep, suddenly wavered before him, dim, and then vivid: swift curves of faces revolved, mutable and mingling. A grotesque head expanded before him, thick-lipped and evil-eyed: abruptly, it was merged with lines of beauty. A girl's face, lovely and provocative, laughed, and receded. He strained to follow, his eyes answering the challenge, his lips parted. Sleep blotted the illusion.

He dreamed fantastically of a white-haired, hook-nosed man, very old, riding whirlwinds on a malacca cane, of which the handle was a golden eagle. The old man gibed, high in air, as he passed over houses and cottages, and looked straight down, for they were roofless, at the people within, men and women and children, sleeping with closed eyes. And he made bitter jests, calling out to them to waken, and lose no portion of the misery and mockery of life; to waken, for time was measured and they had urgent

things to do. Then, laughing shrilly, he flung down handfuls of frozen clouds, which broke into icy hail and pattered upon the floors of the roofless rooms, causing a continued tinkling, like the ringing of . . .

He sat up, conscious and alert. His electric bell was sounding. He stretched out his hand for the speaking tube at the side of the bed.

"Hello! Yes. What is it, please? What? Good God! I will be down in one minute, Mrs. Harrington."

He dressed swiftly and went downstairs, taking his overcoat and a cap as he passed through the hall. He stopped in the dining-room to put on the boots that were waiting by the dying fire, and then, hurrying on through the surgery, turned the key.

His actions had been astonishingly rapid, yet, throughout, so controlled that they appeared spacious and deliberate. He was ready, because he had been prepared to be ready; because, on the chair by his bed, his clothes had been ready, in the order in which they would be needed. Method had justified itself.

He opened the door. A woman was waiting in the porch. He drew her inside.

"But this is madness, Mrs. Harrington," he said decisively. He did not close the inner door.

CHAPTER III

THE wind was still howling, but the rain had almost ceased.

In the glow of the red lamp that hung in the porch, the face of the woman was tinted, making less apparent the exhaustion buffeted into it by the storm, and the fear that had called her out on a night so harsh. The delicate profile seemed shrivelled by the stinging cold that had been flung furiously upon it: her clothes hung limply, wet and stained with mire; as she breathed unevenly, she quivered. Curiously, while Ward looked at her, a derelict from the darkness, a thought shaped itself which had not come to him before, when he had seen her in the light and warmth of her house. "She has been a beautiful woman." It was almost like an actual voice.

He took her to a chair.

"No," she said. "Walter — he — I was frightened — "

"Sit down," Ward said curtly. He turned away, lit a spirit-lamp, and filled the small kettle with water. "How did you get here?" he asked. "Who drove you?"

She looked at him, surprised at the question and the tone. "Where could I get a carriage?" she asked.

"How did you come?" he repeated.

"I walked, of course."

"From your house — here — in the darkness — on a night like this?" His eyes gleamed. "My God!" he said to himself.

"I had to come." She rose. "Dr. Ward, I — I think Walter is dying." She held out a hand beseechingly. "Please come. It took so long for me to get here, and I — I do not know what may have happened." Her head sank. "He may be dead. Walter may be dead."

She swayed. Ward pushed her gently into the chair again. "We will go at once," he said. "I have everything ready. Wait for me." He went out, buttoning his coat, to the barn that served as a garage. In a little while she heard the whirring of the car, and he came in. She went toward him.

"One moment," he said, busying himself with the boiling kettle. Scarcely conscious of anything except the necessity for haste, she saw him — she remembered afterwards — coming to her with a glass, which steamed. Without waiting for his order, she drank, gasping. The contents were tasteless to her. In her numbed condition, she could not have distinguished undiluted brandy from

water. Her throat was burnt, that was all. To save time, she had gulped, when she should have sipped.

In a few seconds, they were leaping through the mud of the uneven road. The wind, which she had faced when coming, was behind them now. As she leaned back, swathed in rugs, her brain was busy with a verbal tattoo. Whirling wheels! How wonderful was this speed, which could annihilate distance. Whirling wheels! The reiteration seemed to fill the night.

"Mrs. Harrington." Ward repeated the name before she realized that he had addressed her.

He saw that she was listening. "If somebody had to come, why not your husband?"

She looked at him appealingly. "He could n't," she said.

"Why?" Ward demanded, swerving the car round a corner.

"He could n't," she repeated. A sense of the paltriness and futility of concealment swept over her: loyalty was submerged by resentment, by sudden overwhelming antagonism directed against this man, her husband, who could not keep sober for one night, while his only child was dying. "He was drunk," she added to herself, deliberately. It was her revolt from the slavery and degradation of years. Afterwards, she regretted that she had framed the words, even in thought. It seemed like

tainting herself with his rankness. She felt as if she had spoken aloud.

Ward imagined that she had. He could picture the scene — the lonely house, far from neighbours; the sick-room, the wearing anxiety; and suddenly, the relapse which he had known was possible, though the boy seemed to be doing splendidly. He saw the sodden, helpless man; the strange nurse (he was glad that he had insisted upon the nurse) watching the boy, worried, but utterly unable to leave her charge and venture into the unknown lanes to summon help. And Mrs. Harrington herself — how, in God's name, had she drifted into marriage with this mere brute — a man, at his best, before decadence, utterly inferior? The mystery irked him. He glanced at her, swiftly. It seemed strange to think that that frail form had fought through the long miles; stumbling, running; deluged by the rain, beaten back by the remorseless tempest, but straining on again, frozen, gasping. An immense pity surged in him for the woman to whom such a tragedy was merely the appropriate sequel to sad days.

Far to the right, he could see now the glow of the great Hurst ironworks. The furnaces belched flames, flaring beacons in the darkness. He fancied he could hear the clang of hammers, the hum of myriad toilers. The night was not vacant. Men were abroad, doing man's work.

He took the last turn. The house, dimly lit,

became visible. Mrs. Harrington was perfectly silent as he stopped the car and helped her to get out.

"It is all right," he said, assuringly. "You have not had your journey in vain. Don't be afraid. We will pull him through together, you and — " He stopped abruptly. A shadow seemed to float through his head. He remembered that he had slept for only three hours and that there were arrears from other nights.

"I will do my best," he said.

Mrs. Harrington looked at the car. "It did n't take so long to come," she said, "as it did to go."

"It must have seemed like days to you," Ward answered.

He lifted his bag from the compartment at the back of the car and followed her into the house. The wind flung itself at the door as he closed it: the strength of one hand was barely sufficient.

He took off his overcoat and cap, and went upstairs. As he passed a door on the landing, he could hear the stertorous breathing of the drunkard. Before he would enter the sick-room, he insisted that Mrs. Harrington should leave him and put on dry clothes. On the nurse's assurance that her boy was no worse, she went. Ward commenced his task.

CHAPTER IV

PAIN is a harsh thing: it is not always easy to reconcile its existence in extreme forms with the doctrine of suave omnipotence. Yet the feeble cries of little souls are very vain: is God unjust, because limbs are mangled and hearts are racked in the lŏng or sudden catastrophes of life? The potter works with his clay; cuts it and forms it; flings away fragments. And always he looks to the completed work, the final beauty and utility. The fragments are not wasted. On a day, they shall come to him again, pressed together, raw material for his moulding. The lives that die, the flesh and blood that are buried with weeping in untimely graves, — their turn will come. Discarded now, that beauty may be made manifest and purpose fulfilled, they will be used again in an appropriate hour: refashioned, fired, glazed, and made serviceable in their order. Yet comprehension is always hard, and, at the best, imperfect. Often it would seem, not that a God made the universe, but that the universe is making a God: little by little straining forward to a higher type; caring for the present only in that it contains the germ of the ultimate and single perfection.

Just before dawn, the boy died.

Ward had fought for him with the skill and devotion that scarcely excite comment in this generation of miracles, because they are so usual. Yet he had realized, with the absolute finality which seemed to characterize many of his impressions, that defeat was inevitable. He alleviated the suffering: that, at least, was within his power. Toward the end, though knowing that it would weaken the heart, he administered an opiate. Why, when every breath was drawn with agony and death was assured, should he insist upon consciousness and make the tragedy more acute for the dying boy, and the living woman who waited and watched, dry-eyed, her heart shrivelling with the fierceness of that flame of anguish? The boy died, sleeping, if such unconsciousness be sleep; his last dim feeling, his mother's kisses; his last remembrance, her hand on his, her smile (God bless such women!) speeding him to rest. Surely better far this quiet gliding to what may wait beyond, than the horrid gasp for breath, the quivering body stabbed with pain; the unquiet eye, with its mournful accusation; and all the grievous circumstance of undue dissolution.

When it was over, his mother kissed him, and then, kneeling for a little while, tried to pray. The nurse, inured to sorrow, knelt with her, her womanhood only apparent: of the two, she was the less composed. Ward went out of the room: it seemed

better for him not to stay. Suddenly, he remembered the boy's father. He went to the door which he had passed as he came in, when the stertorous breathing of the drunkard came to him nauseatingly. Turning the knob, he entered. The man lay on his bed, fully clothed: the blood-vessels of his face were distended; his cheeks were purple; his creased neck, red. Ward shook him, deliberately; compelled him to waken; dragged him from his stupor to a miserable awareness of existence. It was mere brutality, appropriate to a brute.

The doctor put a pillow under his head and forced him into a semi-recumbent posture. "Can you hear me?" he said. Without waiting for an answer, he shook him again, not roughly. "Your son is dead," he said. "Dead. Do you understand? Walter is dead. He died while you were drunk." He could have struck him, but he turned away and left the room. The drunkard's gaze followed him, half vacuously, half comprehending.

He went downstairs and put on his overcoat; then, remembering his bag, returned reluctantly to the room where the dead boy lay. He was glad to see the perfectly normal expression of the face. Mrs. Harrington came out with him when he had collected his appliances. It occurred to him that he had never seen anyone so calm, in corresponding conditions.

They went together into a room on the ground-

floor — the living-room, evidently: in a small house, the convenient distinctions of wealth or competence cannot always be maintained. She had changed her clothes, at Ward's authoritative request: the black garments that had hung limply about her, saturated and mud-stained, were replaced with simple white, which suited her perfectly. The dignity of severe sorrow, of emotion rigidly controlled, added to the appeal of her rather sharp features: few grow fat on unhappiness or retain softness and flexibility through years of sordid endurance. Her figure was slight — almost girlish; and her manner had ease and distinction.

Ward was struck by her peculiar restraint and the harmony of her appearance. More acutely, he marvelled at her choice of a husband, at the destiny which had brought her to an obscure home, amongst toilers, in a place sacrificed to the unloveliness of large industries. He imagined that she had had many suitors, that her selection could have been made in a class far different from the one with which she had identified herself. She had breeding, unmistakably: the subtle stamp of caste had not been effaced.

She looked into his eyes. In hers, was the appeal sometimes seen in those of children orphaned from infancy: the pain of loneliness, imperfectly understood; the groping toward a solution of the enigma.

"He was a good boy," she said at last. "Upright, straight-limbed, clean-hearted. I do not understand why he is dead." She stood quite still. "I am a Christian, Dr. Ward. I have tried to live, so far as a woman's will could carry me, as our Lord has taught us. I have tried to help my boy, so that he would have ideals, and reverence, and simplicity. It seemed that that was my task, of duty, and love, and gladness; that its fulfilment was my glory, the end for which I was born, to which all my hopes and fears and natural strivings tended inevitably from the beginning. I cannot understand why he is dead. It seems so — so arbitrary, or careless. Surely high endeavours cannot be subject to utter chance! Why has God erased him, as if he were a mistake, a triviality?"

"It is difficult to understand," Ward said, simply. "I wish I could help you, Mrs. Harrington. I know there is a reason; there must be. Perhaps he has been spared great pain. Life is rarely happy, though we cling to it. It must be far better to be at rest; quite free from sorrow and sin; so very quiet."

"So very quiet," she repeated. She moved away, and came back. "It seems unjust," she said.

"Not unjust," Ward answered. "Nothing can be unjust, however greatly it may hurt, unless we ourselves are responsible for it. Perhaps, if he had lived, he might have been — afflicted. There may

have been something in him that would have developed, and inevitably brought suffering . . ."

"You think he might have become like his father?" she asked.

Ward did not attempt evasion. He knew that pain can partially neutralize pain. "It is possible," he said.

Mrs. Harrington bowed her head. "Even if he had become a drunkard, he could never have been utterly base. He had the gift of really loving beauty. Many pretend to. With him, it was an instinct. Yet he is dead. He will kiss me no more with warm lips. Dr. Ward, I am trying to be resigned, and to accept a great sorrow in the spirit of a Christian . . ." She sat down. "Forgive me. I have no right to distress you. You have been very, very kind. You have done so much for me, and for Walter. No doubt it is better for him to be dead. But I do not like to think of the coldness . . . the body becomes icy, does n't it? . . . And his lips had such a beautiful curve, a perfect Cupid's bow, Dr. Ward. I have sometimes thought of him getting older and entering into a man's heritage . . . loving purely. . . . But he is dead. It is finished."

Ward did not know what to say. There was silence for a little while. Then — grotesquely, incongruously, horribly — the sound of heavy, clumsy footsteps came to him, as a gross body lowered

itself from step to step of the creaking stairs. They waited, looking toward the door. The suspense seemed intolerable.

Harrington lurched in. The purple had gone from his face, the raw redness from his creased neck. His eyes, bloodshot, were fixed in a disquieting stare. Slowly, he moved them; perceived his wife and Ward; watched them, evidently ill at ease.

"What 's this about Walter?" he asked. "Eh?" He clutched a chair and moved it slowly with him, as he came nearer.

Mrs. Harrington closed her eyes. "Tell him, please," she said.

Ward took a step toward the paranoiac. "Walter — is dead," he said, in a low voice.

"Aye?" said Harrington. "So?" He stood for a moment, breathing noisily; then turned, and walked, swaying, out of the room. They heard again his heavy, clumsy footsteps as he mounted the stairs.

The tension had been extreme. As the sounds receded, and ceased, the strained nerves relaxed abruptly. Mrs. Harrington even smiled: it was a spasm of pain, curiously distorted.

"Let the dead bury their dead," she said in a whisper, almost as if she were asking herself a question. She rose, and was walking from the room, her face set, her eyes shining. She seemed unconscious of Ward's presence.

He detained her.

"Where are you going, Mrs. Harrington?"

"To light the lamps," she answered. "It is dark. I cannot see."

"There is enough light," he said, gently. "Try to listen to me, Mrs. Harrington. You are tired, utterly worn out. You must go to bed. You understand? You *must*, at once."

She nodded. The strength in him, the deliberate will, controlled her.

"You will sleep," he continued. "When you wake, you will be yourself again. There is one other thing. You ought to have somebody with you — somebody whom you know well and can trust — a relative, perhaps. Is there anyone whom you could ask to come? Think."

She obeyed him like a child, puckering her brows. "There is my sister," she said at last. "I have not seen her for a long time, but she would come."

He took out his note-book. "Her name and address, please? I will telegraph to her."

She crossed to a small table and picked up an unsealed letter. "I had written to her," she said, "before — Walter was worse. I need not send the letter now." She drew out the sheet of note-paper and gave him the envelope. "That is the address."

He put the envelope in his pocket. "You will go to sleep now?" he asked.

"Yes." She had recovered her composure. "Thank you for all your kindness."

He held her hand for a moment, and again, as when he had first seen her, a storm-waif, in his surgery, he realized that her beauty must have been remarkable before unhappiness shadowed it. His pity for her overflowed the ordinary barriers of restraint. Bending his head, he touched her hand with his lips. Afterwards, the incident seemed stilted and sentimental. At the time, it was almost involuntary — an act of homage to a woman who had knelt at the shrines of loveliness and sorrow, and given gifts.

CHAPTER V

IT was nearly two hours after sunrise when Ward started his car and glided away from the solitary house. The wind was blowing gustily, though not with the extreme violence of the night: the sky, still sombre, was littered with wreckage of clouds, hurried again interminably to the west, which had sent them out, slow, vast, and threatening, for many ominous days. The storm, with its savagery, was over: flotsam remained as its record.

He did not retrace the course that he had followed on the journey out, but turned into Newchurch, where there was a branch post office, attached to a grocer's shop. It took him some time to compose what he considered a satisfactory telegram, asking Mrs. Harrington's sister to come to her without delay: when he had finished, he drew out the envelope that had been given to him, to transcribe the address. He read, with some surprise, "Lady Winter, Hyde Park Hotel, London, W." The name was unfamiliar to him, but it increased his astonishment at Mrs. Harrington's sad and lonely life, and the causes that had brought her within that dreary environment.

He passed the form to the gawky girl who was staring, as if fascinated, at his own face. While he was paying the charges, the proprietor, Mr. Balding, came in. He was a little man, somewhat corpulent, and with an excessively red complexion: an important little man, for he owned, besides the grocery store, the public house adjoining — the chief public house of the village, discreetly conducted. Mr. Balding was no panderer to a depraved appetite for alcohol. He had inherited the inn and managed it with a due sense of responsibility. On Sundays, conspicuously, and unobtrusively on week-days, he was a pillar of the Church. As vicar's warden, he held a position of dignity. As the richest man in the village, he added éclat to that position.

He saluted the doctor, cordially; surveyed him, as if measuring the possibilities of news; but asked no questions. Ward was indisposed to talk. He noticed that the girl still stared while collecting the coins that he had placed on the counter. Her utter unattractiveness seemed almost irksome. It was incongruous for a woman to be without charm of any kind.

As he drove home, he perceived that the clayey mud of the road was already caking. About half way, he overtook a girl who was tramping steadily on. He glanced with approval at her thin, grave face and lithe figure.

"Good-morning, Miss Heath," he called, stopping the car. "Let me give you a lift."

She hesitated. "I don't know, doctor," she said. "The last time, you see, you took me half way to Hanford and at least three miles past your own house. I don't like you to do that."

"The motor was n't tired," he answered. "But that was two months ago. You have evidently a remarkable memory. I won't worry you this time. Jump in. You may as well save yourself a mile, you know."

He was glad to have her in the car. She brought with her an atmosphere of quiet strength that appealed to him.

"I have n't seen you since Christmas," he said. "Where have you been hiding yourself?"

She laughed. "In my usual haunts — the small house, and the large highway."

"What kind of Christmas did you have?" he asked. "Quiet but happy, with the mistletoe overworked?"

"Extremely boisterous," she answered composedly. "On Christmas Eve we decorated the cottage in the old way — as much as we could — and fixed up a fragment of mistletoe — just on the off chance that it might be appreciated. Unfortunately, it was n't. Still, it looked suggestive. Then we pretended. Make-believe is n't so easy now as it used to be, but Lydia and I are rather good

at it. We played at being children, and hung up our stockings very carefully. Then we told each other fairy tales till we fell asleep. It was quite exciting. But the stockings were empty in the morning and the excitement had worn off; so we gave each other a sovereign and had a good laugh over it. There are moments in life when one must either laugh or cry."

"If she had been two years older, she would have omitted the last sentence," Ward reflected, critically.

Miss Heath had continued. "Afterwards, we went to church, of course. I don't remember what we did in the afternoon: just nothing, I think. In the evening we played blind man's buff till it got monotonous. It soon becomes monotonous when there are only two playing. You would have been amused if you had seen us when we had sobered down. It was very quiet — so quiet that we found ourselves walking about on tip-toe whenever we wanted to get anything. It was a great day." She laughed. "Now you will be good enough to stop, doctor. No, not another yard. Thank you for trying to make me lazy." She jumped out. "I suppose you 've had a night of it?" she said. "Don't burn the candle in the middle as well as at both ends." She waved her hand cheerfully and trudged on.

He watched her for a moment. This was her

daily task — to walk five miles to Hanford, give music lessons for a pittance, and tramp back again. Generally, she had her violin with her, in its case. He wondered where it was that morning. Perhaps she had found some place where she could leave it and so escape the burden of carrying it constantly to and fro.

The dreariness that limits so many lives, appalled him. He turned the car abruptly, ran back a little, grazing the hedge, and swept into the roughly paved yard. The large, uneven stones, cleansed by the rain, were grey-white. A few puddles, not yet dried by the wind, remained as evidence of the deluge.

Marple did not respond to the toot of the horn, so he ran the car into the barn — of which the doors were open — and then walked back to the surgery. As he passed through into the house, an unmistakable odour greeted him. He paused by the dining-room door, sniffed, and went in. In two minutes he was eating ham and eggs, and drinking coffee, marvelling at the competence of Miss Sands. He did not know that that admirable woman had watched for an hour and a half from an attic window, waiting till the car came into view; then, descending to the kitchen, she had prepared sustenance for the weary. This is the way in which most of the impromptus of genius are born.

He regarded her as a miracle of prevision; told

her so (knowing that recognition in little things is a great thing); and then, comforted, but utterly tired and absurdly conscious of an unshaven chin, was withdrawing to his bedroom: at the foot of the stairs, he remembered Marple.

"Miss Sands!" he called.

She came out.

"Marple?" he asked, briefly.

"He has gone to the station," she answered.

Ward nodded, as if checking off an item that had been dealt with. "There was a letter from my grandfather?"

"Lord Daventry wrote that he would come by the early train." She looked at him curiously. "As you anticipated," she added.

"Very well," he said. "I will be down soon."

"There were several letters," she suggested. "Will you look at them?"

"Not now." He mounted the stairs. "If anybody comes for me, tell them to wait; and if I 'm not down in an hour, knock me up, please." He paused on the landing. "The boy died," he said; and went on to his room.

CHAPTER VI

AN hour later, he came down, shaven and refreshed, though not completely alert. But the cold water into which he had plunged after a brief nap, had brightened him up and dispelled the strain of fatigue. The loss of sleep for the greater part of two nights, and the anxiety of his work, had effect chiefly in an apparent shadow round the eyes, which gave a slight expression of wistfulness to the face.

The sun had broken through the barriers of clouds and was shining brightly. The wind had still further decreased, the icy nip had gone from the air, and the freshness of premature spring transformed the day that had opened sombrely, shadowed by the storm.

He went into his study to read his letters. Seated in an easy chair was an old man, hook-nosed, almost hairless: the shape of the head was distinctly aquiline. His eyes were grey-green, and curiously noticeable. His hands, very white, were clasped together, and he was gazing into the heart of the fire, with his thin lips curved into a smile that was almost a sneer. He looked round as

Ward entered, and then rose, showing a figure slightly under medium height, though the general impression of shrinkage made it seem less.

"Good-morning, Saint John," he said, in a voice unusually high, but not unpleasant.

Ward shook hands. "I am glad to see you," he said, gravely. "I have been looking forward to your visit."

"Not a bit," the old man retorted. "Lies, mere lies: conventional and pardonable, but still mere lies. Why don't you tell the truth? Why don't you tell me I 'm a nuisance, an incubus, an old man of the sea? Eh? Well, never mind." He sat down again. "So your saintship has been out all night?" He glanced at the pale, resolute face, which showed so few signs of weariness. "Soothing anguish, bringing comfort to the afflicted, and generally playing the part of a little tin god? Eh? You medical people always remind me of the devil. He operates through our passions. You operate wherever you can. It 's a curious craving, in both cases. But I prefer the devil. He gives us a run for our money. Eh?"

Ward opened his letters. "I have n't the honour of his acquaintance," he said cheerfully.

"At present," the old man snapped. "But you 'll soon meet him. We Wards always do. We get very chummy. There 's some peculiarity in our blood that makes us value his friendship. He knows

so many pretty women. Perhaps that 's the reason." He stared into the fire. "If every woman were as ugly as sin, there would n't be many divorces."

"Or many marriages, probably," Ward put in.

"A man does n't marry a woman because she 's pretty, nowadays," Lord Daventry said. "He marries her because she has a pretty way with her — a golden way. We all know that. It 's worse than ancient history, because there is n't any romance in it. It 's merely an economic principle. We shall soon get into the habit of entering our marriages in our profit and loss accounts: so much cash on one side, so much interest due, and so much wife — overdue — on the other, the debit side. But divorces — ugly women are never divorced: they divorce their husbands. It 's rank improvidence, because they may never replace them. But I suppose they don't like to be merely shareholders instead of directors. It 's curious that single women should always have a double charm for married men, and married women for bachelors. It shows the power of knowledge. Unmarried women don't know what a married man does, and married women know what a bachelor does n't — in theory. Eh? All attraction is based on ignorance — on one side, at least. That is why the serpent was such a nuisance in the Garden of Eden. He destroyed Eve's charm by making her realize that she was charm-

ing. Immediately, she hankered for fig-leaves. Men have been paying large millinery bills ever since."

The sinister old man prattled on.

Ward finished his letters, and wrote a brief note.

"I must go out now," he said. "Would you care to come with me?"

Lord Daventry suppressed an epigram. "I shall be delighted to resume acquaintance with your patients — if any of last year's crop survive. By the way, how is time dealing with its little Sands? The admirable woman seems to have aged, John; though that is possibly a reflection from my own too-obvious condition. Yet she has a singular charm — from the culinary point of view. She welcomed me with dignity, and with poached eggs; soothed me with kindly attentions, and with coffee; criticised me, doubtless, with dry humour, as she provided the dry toast that my soul, if I possess one, persistently craves. She seems to make a hobby of remembering one's special preference. I asked her how she did it. She said it was less trouble to remember than to make an effort to forget. An astonishing woman, but not vivacious."

"Miss Sands does not seem to me to have grown older," Ward said. "She is one of the people whom time never catches unprepared."

"You have infected her with your vices," rejoined the old man. "It is a terrible thing to be immaculate. Perfection is a sin. One can commit

adultery, for example, and still have a sense of humour. But one cannot commit perfection without losing one's self-respect and breaking every commandment in the decalogue. If I could remember them at the moment, I would elaborate my point to your entire dissatisfaction."

"I am convinced of it," Ward assented, glancing at his watch. "Will it suit you if we start in a quarter of an hour?"

"Perfectly." His gaze lingered curiously upon his grandson's face — the high brow, surmounted by jet-black hair; the small, firm mouth, with the scarlet border. "You slept well, I trust, in the rather short space of time at your disposal? Eh?"

Their eyes met — the clear grey of the younger man, the grey-green of the older. Both smiled, a trifle mockingly.

"I slept profoundly," Ward answered, moving from the room. "If it will not take you more than thirteen minutes to put on your hat, we shall be able to start punctually."

At eleven o'clock, they drove out in the dog-cart, Marple behind. Lord Daventry noted with approval the clean, well-cared-for trap, the polished harness, the shining silver. The colour scheme was black, with no thin red lines of discord. Marple's livery harmonized: his grave, close-shaven face set the seal of distinction upon the turn-out. Ward himself, however, was dressed in light grey, with a

soft felt hat to correspond. His grandfather, frock-coated, silk-hatted, very precise, sneered competently at the surroundings.

He lifted his eyebrows as they passed through the gate.

"Pig-sties?"

"The same pig-sties," Ward said, "in the same place. A little older; perhaps a little more weather-worn: but recognizable. You will remember that you noticed them the last time you were here; also, the time before."

"My eyesight is evidently unimpaired," the old man rejoined, composedly. "But if pig-sties, why not pigs? And if pigs, why not — "

"Quite so," Ward interposed. "I will think seriously about your recommendation."

Lord Daventry turned his attention to the neglected road, the straggling fence of decayed posts and old wire that limited the footpath on one side, and the sequence of dreary scenes on the other: — the rusty rails and rotten ties of an abandoned cross-line; disorderly mounds of the refuse of a mineral country; infrequent cottages with bare and gloomy gardens.

"Arcadia," he observed, sniffing.

"Glad you like it," Ward responded, genially. "I knew your sense of beauty was reliable, though shy."

"Arcadia," the old gentleman repeated, with

authority. "But in a raw state. Very raw. In a few generations after your death, the neighbourhood will begin to be habitable. The thought must be peculiarly exhilarating to you. I begin to understand why, with your temperament and traditions, you have chosen this environment. You are looking forward to the future. It is very provident to look so far ahead. But you have youth and hope — admirable lenses for a time-telescope. They reflect what you wish to see. We blasé people have to be contented with the opera-glasses of age and the artificial light of experience; and what we see is sometimes a rather painful reflection of our wishes. Disillusion has its sad moments. Marriage is an obvious example. I assure you that only a man who is capable of anything is incapable of remorse. We who draw the line at every folly," he paused almost imperceptibly for the desired effect, "of which we happen to be ignorant — well, we pay for the omissions. Neglected opportunities can never be replaced, and unhatched chickens have a habit of roosting in their ghostly addled eggs upon the walls that circumscribe our little lives — the humpty-dumpties of improvidence. Always hatch your chickens, John. Every city is a convenient incubator. Regret nothing that you do. That was Nietzsche's legacy to mankind: having bequeathed it, he changed his mind and became insane. Genius, like all tyrannies, has its drawbacks:

for time is curiously democratic. Where is there a republic so consistent as a cemetery? Eh? "

They were passing the parish church, with its records of the dead — crosses and slabs of stone, time-worn, defaced, and slanting, or still erect and uncorroded, marking more recent gleanings: here and there, pretentious granite proclaimed the little pride of wealth. One large vault, iron-railed and massive, loomed sombrely, the monarch of those mute memorials.

The old man pointed. " All the distinctions of caste above," he said, " but very little distinction underneath."

They drove to the vicarage. The vicar himself was in the garden, playing laboriously with a rake. Age sat heavily upon his heavy frame. His scanty hair was almost white: his beard, unusually long and full, had patriarchal implications. He stooped as he walked; stooped when he drew himself to his utmost height. In his melancholy eyes, the ashes of enthusiasm barely smouldered. His large hand quivered as he held it out: his voice was cavernous, his manner mystical. He seemed, while he gazed at their faces, to be peering through them into a world of dim memories, which they occluded.

He welcomed them gravely.

" A rather unusual visit, Dr. Ward," he said. " A rather unusual visit — fortunately." He softened the unintended suggestion. " I mean, of

course, that my robust health makes it unnecessary for me to ask for your aid professionally. I have much to be thankful for. Much to be thankful for."

Lord Daventry grinned at the ambiguity.

The vicar was puzzled. "Your friend . . . ?" he suggested, glancing at Ward. "I seem to recall his features . . . and yet . . ."

"You have met Lord Daventry before, Mr. Thorpe," Ward said. "Surely you remember him?"

The vicar smiled. "Of course. Of course. How do you do, sir? I am glad to renew our acquaintance."

"Really, Thorpe, you make me feel young," Lord Daventry said. "I still remember myself with perfect clearness, even after the lapse of so many years. Yet you forget me in a few months."

"I have much to think of," the patriarch explained. "Much to think of. You will excuse me. But I grow forgetful, I know. Strangely forgetful." He gazed placidly through the grey-green eyes and eagle face. "I should surely have remembered your pleasant humour and kindly interest in the affairs of my parish. You have come at a good time, Lord Daventry. A good time. We have a little gathering in a few days, just a village function — in connection with the church, of course; a quiet tea, with plain, wholesome cake;

an evening of simple and innocent merriment — recitations, songs, and some excellent instrumental music. You will be glad to be with us, I know; for I remember now, quite clearly, your keen interest in human nature, of all grades; and there is a good deal of human nature in our rather unlovely neighbourhood: yes, a good deal of human nature."

"Arcadia," Ward murmured.

"Raw," his grandfather returned, almost without separating his lips. "Very raw."

"I wonder," continued the vicar pensively, "if I could count upon you for some small item to enliven our evening — a brief address, an account of a few of your varied experiences —?"

"I fear," Lord Daventry observed, "that they would scarcely be appropriate for a quiet village function — in connection with the church. I would rather not be a performer, Thorpe; but as a spectator, I shall enjoy myself. I trust you will open sufficient windows to ensure reasonable ventilation. These little gatherings, however racy of the soil, have a habit of being scarcely reminiscent of fresh air."

Ward intervened, touching abruptly a tragic note. "Mr. Thorpe, I want you to go over to Clayfield to see Mrs. Harrington. Her boy died this morning, and she needs your help."

"Dead?" said the vicar. "Walter dead?" He stood for a moment, deliberating. "He was a

bright, brave boy. A bright, brave boy. Sad that the flowers should perish before the withered leaves . . . Poor woman! I will certainly go to her. I will go at once." He looked at Lord Daventry, wanly. "You and I, we stay," he said. "We stay, with our sluggish blood, and shrivelled force, and bitter memories. And the young and glad-hearted die. The loved, the promising, are taken; the useless remain. Strange. Strange."

"Forgive me if I object to being classified as useless," Lord Daventry observed. "A mere prejudice on my part, no doubt: but I cling to it. No member of the House of Lords can be useless: he is always invaluable as a subject for political abuse." He surveyed the vicar dispassionately. "You are certainly aging, Thorpe. You are losing your sense of proportion. I should not be at all astonished to hear before long that you had seceded to the Catholics."

The vicar stiffened. "I cannot very well secede to a Church of which I am already a member," he said, with dignity. "Already a member. Possibly you refer to the Italian or Roman Church. I have noticed that confusion still exists amongst the more ignorant laity. The more ignorant laity. I will wish you good-morning." He bowed, and moved slowly away.

Ward smiled. "He scored against you there," he said to his grandfather.

The old man did not seem disturbed. "Certainly," he admitted. "'Ignorant laity' was good. Thorpe is n't so harmless as he looks."

A long drive ensued, through scattered villages and hamlets, over rough, circuitous roads. The air was tainted with smoke and mist, drifting heavily from the collieries and ironworks in the distance. Everywhere, unloveliness met them. Little houses, cheap and new, flaunted their ugliness in the drab setting of older buildings, slovenly or decayed. Yet the shining sun lit up vistas of a gayer world beyond, of smoother roads, hedged fields, and infrequent mansions of the rich: winding avenues could be seen, soft lawns, and little gleaming lakes. Here and there they found relics of the fury of the storm: a fallen tree, tiles blown from roofs, timber ripped from the rough wooden shelters for cattle.

"It must have been a wild night," the old man said, gazing at a chimneyless cottage.

"Yes," Ward said. "Very wild."

It was a long way round: every patient represented, on an average, about two miles. Lord Daventry took a keen interest in each visit; went in with his grandson; conversed with the humble. Several times, to his gratification, he was remembered. He was gracious on these occasions; exerted himself to please, and left behind an impression of affability, which became in due time a legend. But on the way back he scoffed and gibed as be-

fore; sneered at the lowly lives of these outworn toilers; made a jest of their patience and necessities.

As they swung into the lane that led directly home, they encountered Alice Heath, returning from Hanford. She smiled shyly as Ward saluted her, Lord Daventry following suit punctiliously; and passed on.

"You sometimes wonder," Ward said, "why I have chosen this environment, and remain in it. That is one of the reasons."

Lord Daventry was slightly ruffled. "I trust," he said, "that you are not contemplating the imbecility of a mésalliance?"

"I was thinking of courage, not marriage," Ward said. "She represents the quiet, uncomplaining heroism that is rather prevalent in this neighbourhood. You look only at the darkness. To me, it is transfigured by the loveliness of some of the lives that it has moulded. That girl, for example, with her grave, thin face, is always beautiful in my thoughts. I know her simplicity, her strength, her will to do what is right. Fate has not been very kind to her. The only gifts she has known have been those of loneliness and poverty. I have never heard her complain. She lives with her sister in a little cottage. They both work hard. Day follows day. Routine repeats itself. They become older. Voilà!"

"A natural process," Lord Daventry observed. "Had you told me that they became younger, you would have interested me. I begin to believe that youth is really the wonderful thing that poets have proclaimed. It is a pity that one cannot be young without being youthful. If one could only commence again, innocent but wise, how delightful would be the pursuit of pleasure. One would not repeat the mistake of squandering that innocence lavishly, for a return so inadequate. Every fragment should be weighed, and sold for its full value. No more painted roses, artificial, perfumeless; no more darkened eyelashes, rouged cheeks, vermilioned lips and meretricious smiles; no more madness of craving that grovels amongst ashes, while love's white flame shines ever in the ewigkeit of passion, luring and eluding!" He checked himself. "I apologize for the relapse," he said. "It was not serious."

They drove into the wide yard. It was already late in the afternoon and the mimicry of spring seemed less real as the sunlight faded. The softness was passing from the air, and the growing breeze, no longer warmed, struck bleakly in their faces. They were glad to get indoors to the cheerful fire and to refresh themselves with the light lunch that Miss Sands had prepared, gauging their return precisely. Lord Daventry complimented her, and at once, fearing that he had gone too far,

neutralized the effect with a polished gibe. The ordinary routine of the surgery followed for the doctor: Lord Daventry slept, recruiting energy for a new campaign.

The curate called in the evening, and remained for dinner. The Reverend Cecil Hubert Morrison was under thirty; slightly built; agile and springy in his movements; alert mentally. Ward liked him; admired his genuineness; trusted the promise of his clear blue eyes. He had heard him preach; seen him in the pulpit, swaying simple people with simple words and the force of sincerity. To Lord Daventry he was a novelty, imported since the previous visit. He surveyed him with the air of an epicure preparing to carve a new trifle, insubstantial, yet with possibilities. But the curate was not easily carved. He had the resisting power of toughness. Ward enjoyed the contest.

While they smoked their cigars, the old man became almost genial. He suggested parochial topics, and listened with interest. His manner was soothing, and Morrison, gratified, chatted at ease, covering a wide range. When he rose to go, Lord Daventry thanked him.

"I now comprehend local conditions," he said. "I have rarely heard scandal so delicately and yet so exhaustively treated. Collating your information with all that I have been able to glean during the day, I think I can resume the entertainment

where it was interrupted by the conclusion of my last visit. It is delightful to feel that one is not an outsider, that one enjoys a peculiar intimacy with the secret history of these primitive people. I shall meet many of them, I trust, at the social gathering which is to take place, I understand from the vicar, in a few days. I look forward to a pleasant evening."

"I hope the pleasure will be mutual," said Morrison, drily. He turned to Ward. "By the way, old man, with regard to the Harringtons — sad, is n't it? The vicar told me he had been over to Clayfield. He has asked me to make arrangements for the funeral, so you need n't worry about that. Old Harrington, he tells me, was like a man in a trance. He did n't go to the ironworks to-day. That was natural, of course. But he has n't been for several days, I believe, and he 's pretty sure to lose his job unless he alters altogether. The vicar says he was n't drunk, though he 'd evidently had a bout not long before. But he seemed dazed. It makes it very hard for Mrs. Harrington. She ought n't to be alone, you know. It is n't right."

"I sent a wire for her this morning, to her sister, asking her to come," Ward said. "I think she will, if her disposition is at all like Mrs. Harrington's. I made the telegram as clear as I could, and quite urgent."

"You think of everything," said Morrison grate-

fully. "Well, I must be off. Good-night, Lord Daventry. If there is any additional information that I can dig out for you, don't hesitate to let me know."

The old man bowed gravely. "You have evidently a great career before you, Mr. Morrison. Do not sacrifice it by allowing yourself to become a bishop prematurely."

Pondering this cryptic utterance, the curate went out with Ward. As he descended the steps, he chuckled. The sound was immediately suppressed by the wind, which was gustily threatening a renewal of the gale.

Ward returned to his grandfather, who was as tired as himself; escorted him to his bedroom, and committed him to the care of Philpotts, whom he had brought with him. Philpotts was privileged and indispensable. For more than twenty years Lord Daventry had relied upon him: no one but Philpotts knew how much of the old man was Daventry, and how much was Philpotts. Discreetly, Philpotts put the blend to bed.

Ward went to his own room. His eyes were heavy with arrears of sleep. His preparations, though methodical as usual, were half unconscious. The rattling of the windows, the noises of the gathering storm, seemed to carry him back to the conditions of the preceding night. It was difficult to realize that so many hours had passed: rather

had time swung at anchor, freighted with dreams, through the ebb and flow of a tide.

The pressure on his head crushed him. Fragments of his experiences represented themselves, disconnectedly: the ringing of a bell; an eagle-faced man, wrinkled and old; a woman, cold and storm-swept, quivering, strange-eyed, in a red light. His last vague thought was connected with Mrs. Harrington. He wondered if her sister resembled her.

CHAPTER VII

THE days passed: Ward was busy, for the changing weather, the alternation of sunshine and extreme cold, manufactured many patients. He was glad to be occupied — not because it brought him profit: there was little to be gleaned in that barren country; but because his craving for action, for something that would serve to arrest reverie and check brooding, was satisfied fully. He liked best to go home tired, feeling that he had helped, though scantily, to lessen the world's vast total of pain: it was good to get into bed with heavy eyes that only an effort of will could keep from closing; to drift superbly, with a momentary interval of imperfect visions, into the annihilation of deep sleep; and to wake, virile and at ease, unclogged by the aftermath of emotion.

Lord Daventry inhabited the large house comprehensively. It had seemed rather desolate during the winter: there were many vacant rooms — some altogether empty, some furnished very simply for possible visitors. But they had not been used during Ward's tenancy. They merely added to the sense of loneliness. It is strange to climb the stairs

of a house that is old and wind-shaken; to wander along wide landings, where many eddying currents meet mysteriously; and to know that in seven rooms are not seven sleepers, dreaming or dreamless; but the sounds of the night, and the darkness of the night, and such memorials as the dead may leave. For the influence of those who have lived never passes wholly from the places that they haunted, though they haunt them no more, perhaps, with the taint that the timorous fear, with the sudden glimmering of pallid faces and the fluttering of cerecloths. Yet, where that old man wandered, keen-eyed and eagle-faced, he seemed to sweep away all ghostly fancies. The fictions of time palsied in his presence. No sanctity of dim shadows could arrest his gibes or moderate the high, peculiar voice. He exorcised the spirit of the past with mocking words and a twitching of thin lips: such melancholy as may linger within walls that were upstanding in other centuries, was outmoded now. Cynicism pervaded the air. The house reeked with pungent epigrams.

The night of the little social gathering arrived, clear and cold. Lord Daventry had looked forward to it with malicious interest: weary of the poverty of the rich, he desired, he said, to examine the treasures of the poor. Their simple-heartedness and natural ways would invigorate him. He was disgusted with the shallowness of his own class,

which lived habitually on the surface of thought and emotion, and refrained from delving into the crust. But these toilers worked very definitely under the ground. They would provide fuel for the fires of inspiration.

He stretched out a lean, white hand and gazed at it meditatively. "I can remember," he said, "when this hand would tremble as it clasped frail fingers. It clasped so many that the thrill soon wore away: but it still trembles. Age is absurd in its mimicry of youth. Cold and heat can both produce quivering. But there is a difference. You, my own Saint John, have probably not noticed it. The devil is scarcely ingenious enough to attract your interest. The temptations that have sufficed for so many dear, damned souls, are flung in vain against your adamant indifference. It is a wonderful thing to possess your acute interest in women — as pathological curiosities. You have dissected the sex too literally. It is a pity. One should always leave a little to the imagination. Eh? Without imagination, liaisons would be impossible. No one could fall in love with reality. That, by the way, is why women are never natural. They disguise themselves by appearing charming."

"One should never disregard an incognito," Ward said; and continued: "I have told Marple to bring the car round in half an hour. He will drive you to Newchurch with Miss Sands. I have a

maternity case at Chayle, so I may not see you again till to-morrow. I shall walk over, as the night is so fine. I hope you will have a pleasant time, and not be too bored with the Arcadian ways of our simple people. Be kind to them, for they are accustomed only to the irony of nature, not to the cynicism of men. Tell the vicar I am sorry to be absent; but if he *will* marry his parishioners in May, he must expect to be reminded of it in February."

"Convey my condolences to the happy parents," Lord Daventry said. "I trust the reminder will not be twins. Thorpe has such a habit of repeating himself that he may have married them twice. Eh? — Well, it is time that Philpotts began to build me up for the ordeal of the evening. If I go as a lamb to the slaughter, I may as well be appropriately dressed."

Lambly, he withdrew.

He was ready when Marple appeared with the car. Rejecting evening dress, as incongruous for a village function, he had assumed a dark grey suit. A white and purple orchid, fantastically moulded, was fixed in the flower-sheath contrived by the creator of the immaculate frock-coat. He wore grey suède gloves. Miss Sands, uplifted by rustling silk, had been waiting complacently: but Lord Daventry's arrival at once depressed her. The old man carried with him an atmosphere of dis-

tinction, of supremacy — the supremacy of restraint. His hooked nose and shrunken cheeks were noticeable, but not obtrusive. The housekeeper sighed, and placed caste on a pedestal. Philpotts, inured to caste, placed it, as represented by his master, in the tonneau of the car; swathed it in rugs, and retired, wordless, as Miss Sands had already taken her seat.

Marple drove them skilfully over the awkward road, rutted and hard. He wore a black overcoat, fitting closely, and looked very unchauffeurish. Concealed by the overcoat was a black suit, with a striped tie, black and white. In the button-hole was a red carnation. He wore shining patent shoes, tight to the limit of endurance. For he also was to be a guest at the little social gathering, in connection with the church. His gaze searched automatically the successive sections of the road, upon which the powerful lamps of the car cast their glare: but his inward vision was directed to the moonlit night, which reflected, like a vast mirror, every detail of a conspicuous figure, clothed in a black suit, with a striped tie, black and white; in the button-hole, a red carnation; peeping carelessly from the breast pocket, an expanse of handkerchief, snowy white; on the feet, shining patent shoes, tight and distinguished. He absorbed the reflection as a poet, rapt, segregated from trivialities, absorbs beauty. Insatiable, he continued to absorb.

They arrived at the door of the large schoolroom that had been transformed into a hall of subdued splendour. Balding, churchwarden and master of ceremonies, escorted Lord Daventry and Miss Sands to the far end of the room, where the vicar welcomed them. Marple drove the car down to the inn, placed it in the crude garage, and returned on foot. Entering unobtrusively, he lingered near the door, while his eyes methodically surveyed the assembly. To the right, midway, he perceived a round face, colour glowing in the dimpled cheeks. Touching the striped tie with gentle fingers, to assure himself that it was not disarranged, he drifted, fortuitously, to the right; strolled, nonchalantly, forward; found himself, by accident, midway; surprised at an astonishing rencontre, murmured her name.

The feeding, which is an inseparable feature of such meetings, was over: the sandwiches and cake had disappeared, melting before those earnest Arcadian appetites. Tea had flowed, very literally like water, down Arcadian throats. Now, voluntary helpers were removing the crockery, pushing tables to one side, rearranging chairs. The musical feast was about to begin. In the meantime, conversation, unrestrained, flooded the room. Lord Daventry perceived that the acoustic properties of the building were excellent — an advantage somewhat rare in village schools.

The vicar, heavy and patriarchal, watched with gentle eyes over his flock. The curate, Morrison, was energetically busy. He passed to and fro, agile, alert, cheerful, followed by smiles, or by the half-wistful gaze of some of the girls.

Lord Daventry surveyed the different types of faces — the dull, the bright, the sad, the illumined. The influence of heredity and circumstance was written plainly in the imperfect moulding of many features, in the frequent caricatures of the normal figure: pendent under-lips, sallow faces, corrugated brows bore witness to the legacy of those for whom life is never easy, and often ominous. Privation, patience, long endurance, were stamped indelibly on some: on others, coarseness, shallowness, unruled lusts, and stunted mental growth. Yet not all among the throng were harshly marked: there were pleasant faces, serious or gay, of men and the older women; pretty faces, flushed or calm, of girls; provocative or restful faces.

Lord Daventry turned toward the vicar. "The enigma of life, Thorpe," he observed, "is an amusing piece of bluff."

The vicar, who had not heard him distinctly, nodded. "Yes, I like to see them amused," he said. "I like to see them amused. Their lives are somewhat dreary, you know; and it is our duty to brighten them when we can. We are having two comic songs, and a very funny recitation, Morrison

tells me. A very funny recitation. I wish I could persuade you to contribute to our programme. My people would appreciate it, I know. They have a high regard for you. You see, they admire your grandson greatly, and some of the feeling is naturally reflected upon you, as a member of the family."

"It is a source of great pleasure to me," Lord Daventry said, "to bask in the surplus of John's glory."

"I, personally, have much affection for Dr. Ward," the vicar continued. "Affection, and admiration. I often wonder how he came to be so simple, so strong, so lovable."

"Heredity, my dear Thorpe," Lord Daventry said suavely. "He owes much to his ancestors. Surely you have observed the rather striking resemblance between John and myself?"

"No," the vicar answered. "No. I do not think your grandson resembles you at all."

Lord Daventry chuckled; then suddenly became grave. "He does resemble me, though," he said, after a little while. "More than you imagine, Thorpe — or he, either. We Wards are all alike at heart — very lovable." He laughed. "It 's the taint of the blood. Dear John will show it when some dew-eyed woman drifts into his life and wakens those sleeping whirlwinds that are within him." His expression changed: he gazed moodily at the curate, who, on the temporary platform that had

been erected, announced the first item of the programme — a pianoforte duet. Songs followed, comic and serious. There was a violin solo, by Miss Alice Heath. Lord Daventry remembered that he had passed her a few days before, when driving with his grandson: he recalled the brief account of her history and watched with interest the quiet, firm face and slender figure. He was astonished at her playing, and joined in the applause that demanded an encore. When this had been given, Morrison, in the dialect of the district, told some quaint stories that he had gleaned from miners and men of the fields — tales imbued with something of the spirit of folk-lore. Though he chose the more humorous legends, they were not free from the touch of tragedy: the life of the underworld was woven into them — the world of toil, dim light, and strange forces, with death lurking always, waiting for a slip, for a careless moment, a doomed man. Lord Daventry comprehended that coal had its myths and its mystery — myths that veiled the record of far happenings, mystery that foreshadowed the hazards of the future.

A brief interval followed, before the second part of the programme, including the funny recitation, was commenced. The vicar moved about, exchanging smiles with his parishioners. Morrison, Lord Daventry noticed, was devoting himself blithely to Alice Heath. Miss Sands conversed with Miss

Balding, the churchwarden's sister: their silk dresses had inevitably converged, and met. Balding himself, rotund and red, approached his distinguished visitor; hoped that he was enjoying himself; wondered, diffidently, if his lordship could not see his way to contribute to the programme. A few words, on any topic, would be considered memorable. Lord Daventry hesitated, and then, moved by curiosity as to what he would say, and the nature of its reception by these simple people, consented to address them: he would consider the actual topic during the humorous recitation. Balding, gratified, hastened to spread the important tidings. Faces were turned toward the eminent peer; wandered over his eagle face; rested, wonderingly, upon his hooked nose; withdrew, furtively.

The recitation began. While it was proceeding, the old man meditated. He had committed himself to some kind of address. What should be the subject? Turning to see who was taking possession of the chair next to his own, he was astonished to encounter Ward's serene smile.

"Remarkable celerity," he murmured. "I trust the twins are well?"

Ward answered in a low tone. "A little confusion of dates, due to inexperience. I discovered that the event should not be expected for another week. One sometimes meets with these cases of premature enthusiasm."

Lord Daventry shrugged his shoulders; then asked for advice. "I have promised — foolishly — to address these Arcadians of yours. What shall I talk to them about? Diluted politics? The depression of trade? The duty of humility amongst the lower classes? Or the significance of marriage? Eh?"

Ward reflected. "Oh, tell them something about your last visit to the United States," he said. "They are interested in America, and it 's a fairly safe topic."

"Very well," said the old man. "Who is this humorist? He has a pleasant face."

"His name is Poole," Ward said. "He is employed at the Chayle colliery."

The recitation flowed on, and ceased. During the hand-clapping, Morrison came to them, and then conferred with the vicar. The patriarch rose, and explained that Lord Daventry, whom they were so glad to have with them that evening, had very kindly consented to talk to them informally about the United States, which he had twice visited. They would be deeply interested to hear about that wonderful country, with which they had so many ties of blood and sentiment.

Lord Daventry mounted the low platform, surveyed his audience, and smiled slightly.

"I do not remember," he said, "the first time that I went to America. I was too young, fortu-

nately, to retain any vivid impressions, though I was interviewed, I have been told, by seven reporters, who subsequently claimed that I had inspired a total of seven newspaper columns. I was then two years old — an age which could not possibly inspire anything but disgust in the mind of any reasonable adult . . . the word 'reasonable,' you will observe, obviously excludes all women. Of my second visit, which occurred recently, I retain equally hazy impressions. We arrived in a fog, and left in a fog. It was very gratifying to find that English industries had so wide a vogue."

He surveyed his audience again, with leisurely inquisitiveness, and perceived row after row of attentive but perplexed faces. Encountering his grandson's glance, he interpreted its message of subdued irony. Perfectly composed, he intimated, by an almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders, that he realized the situation. He had made a false start. Adapting himself to his environment, he began, in a quiet, conversational manner, to give a simple account of the most obvious features of the great Republic beyond the seas. He explained, tersely but lucidly, the principles of government and the growth of political institutions; described the social and industrial developments; discussed the conditions of immigration and the prospects of the new settler; contrasted the opportunities still offered by the United States with the greater Cana-

dian inducements; and pointed out the difficulties inevitably associated with the rapid expansion of a new nation, released from the traditions of the old world, not yet quite sure of its own ideals, and compelled to absorb yearly vast hordes recruited from almost all the nations of the earth. Toward the end, he relapsed into his usual caustic style; sneered at the enormous skyscrapers and the enormous fortunes that dominated the landscape and the land; flung out a gibe at New York as a "city of ill-bred aliens, posing as Americans without knowing what Americanism means"; scoffed at the "parody of democracy" which established "equality as a polite theory, and plutocracy as a crude reality"; and concluded with a display of epigrammatic fireworks. His lips twitched as he looked round at the perplexed faces. "Please do not take too seriously anything that I have said. That would certainly be a serious mistake." He bowed, and stepped from the platform. The audience, relieved from strain, began to applaud perfunctorily.

Ward was amused. "I don't believe he knows whether he is trying to be cynical or critical," he whispered to Morrison. "I suppose the habit of not saying what he means has become almost automatic."

"Yes; but he's shrewd," Morrison replied. "He knows what he's talking about, though he

is n't the sort of man who talks about everything he knows."

A little more vocal and instrumental music, and the programme was concluded. But the gathering was not dissolved. The intoxication of dancing remained.

While preparations were being made, Morrison spoke to Ward. "We buried Walter Harrington on Thursday," he said.

Ward nodded. "I know. I meant to come, but could n't."

"I was frightfully sorry for Mrs. Harrington," Morrison went on. "She seemed frozen. Her sister was with her, by the way; so your telegram was not wasted. They are very much alike, but Lady Winter has extraordinary violet eyes."

"That is unusual," Ward said.

Lord Daventry and the vicar came up.

"I think I will go home now, Morrison," the vicar said. "I will leave these dance-loving people in your care."

"If you would n't mind walking down to Balding's place," Ward remarked, "I will get my car and drive you to the vicarage. It won't take us a minute out of our way. Or if you will wait here, I will fetch the car up. I don't care to send Marple: he looks so absurdly happy that it seems a shame not to let him stay for the dancing."

"It would certainly be a pity to disturb him,"

Lord Daventry agreed. "Love's young dream is sacred, especially when it is deferred to middle age. Let us walk down to Balding's. The exercise will do us good. But perhaps Miss Sands," he added, glancing at the housekeeper, "would prefer to stay for a little voluptuous dancing? If I were not quite so old as I appear to be — in spite of Philpotts' admirable work — I should myself enjoy the dangerous delights of a waltz with such a charming partner, for example, as Miss Alice Heath" — he glanced at the curate — "or the very pretty young lady with whom, if I am not mistaken, our humorous friend — Mr. Poole, is it not? — is rather épris."

Ward laughed. "That is Lydia Heath," he said; "Alice's sister. The family seems to have attracted your attention."

"It is evidently a very attractive family," Lord Daventry rejoined, drily.

"Yes," said the vicar. "Yes. They are good girls."

Miss Sands having intimated that she had attained years of discretion and did not desire to dance, they went out together, the vicar and Ward nodding cheerful adieux to their friends. When they had passed through the door, the fresh air struck them coldly. They walked briskly across the road, and then through the shadows to the inn.

The wide rambling street was almost deserted. A dog, scavenging in the gutter, slouched away as they passed. The only light was that of the houses, dim and infrequent. Thirty yards from the inn, however, two roads converged and a primitive lamp-post illuminated a small circle. As they came near, Ward noticed a woman, walking unsteadily. Over her shoulders and head was an old shawl. The vicar also saw her, and hesitated.

"Poor thing," he said. "Poor thing. I really ought to speak to her."

He turned aside. The woman stopped as he reached her, and gazed into his face; then laughed, wildly and horribly.

"You!" she cried. "You! Christ A'mighty! D' ye want to preach to me? You!"

"Yes, Nancy; I," the vicar said sadly. "Why won't you let me help you to make an effort to lift yourself from this degradation and sin?"

"Sin!" she cried, and began to curse him, foully. The vicar bowed his head, as men do when they face a storm. Ward, who had come to them at the sound of the woman's voice, could see that he was praying.

"For shame, Nancy!" the doctor said. "You are cold and tired: why don't you go home, like a sensible girl, and get to bed?"

The woman looked at him, and laughed. "Sensible!" she repeated. "Sensible! Never mind.

I 'll go. I know I 'm drunk. I 'm always drunk, glory be. Good-night, doctor dear."

She turned away, and left them, beginning to sing after she had taken a few unsure steps. Her quivering voice rose and fell, like the audible shuddering of a lost soul.

" The wages of sin," said the vicar. " The wages of sin. And she was such a bonny lass in the years gone by. Such a bonny lass. And now, a drunkard, and worse than a drunkard: a shamed woman, unashamed. And what shall be done to the man who brought this to pass? What shall be done to him, and to his kind? Surely they shall go into the hell that they have purchased. Verily, verily, I say unto you, they shall by no means come out thence till they have paid the uttermost farthing."

He stood as if unconscious of Ward's presence.

" Come," said Ward quietly. " The others are waiting."

" The uttermost farthing," the vicar repeated.

Ward took his arm. They rejoined the others, and went on to the inn.

As they drove back past the lit schoolroom, they could hear the piano merrily urging on the dancers. Afterwards, it seemed very quiet in the lane. The moon, which had shone so clearly when they came, was veiled with invisible mist.

They left the vicar at his gate, said good-night, and then went home in silence.

CHAPTER VIII

THE pursuit of pleasure is an arduous folly, even for the young, in whom folly seems an inspiration. Idealizing the unknown, and reverencing the untested, they carry their simplicity as a halo and look with bright eyes for cleanness where later they shall discover only the carrion of dead and decaying illusions. But the wanderlust of their race devours them: urged imperiously, they must traverse the seven seas of passion and make pilgrimage through the separate continents; they shall stand with throngs before shrines, or alone with vultures in the desert. One, perhaps, may climb a peak of high Andes or Himalayas, and see, while the thin air stabs the blood, Heaven nearer, yet still sufficiently aloof. The return is tedious, the way littered with little ironies or blocked with ruins of noble endeavours. When it has been achieved, routine, lawful and commonplace, waits for resumption: but youth is irrecoverable. Yet, satiate only with disappointment, avid for the realization of mocked dreams, the old sometimes mimic the outmoded self.

Lord Daventry was irritable at breakfast. "I don't know why I went to your idiotic meeting," he said. "Or rather, I know perfectly well why I went, but I don't know why I could be so absurd, at my age. I suppose one is never too old to be childish. By the way, if this curious concoction were accused of being coffee, it would have no difficulty in establishing an alibi. And I would recommend you to discharge your hens: they are evidently too leisurely and behind the times. An egg is not of much use unless it is up-to-date."

"A hen will hatch duck-eggs," Ward said drily, "but as a rule it does not, I believe, lay them. The egg at which you are now frowning happens to be a duck-egg, placed on the table for my own nourishment. I wondered why you had appropriated it. Even without expert training, it is readily distinguishable from the ordinary egg of the ordinary hen."

"Especially in flavour," the old man snapped. "It is positively indelicate. Perhaps that is why it appeals to you." Forgetfully, he sipped the coffee that he had criticised. "I am disappointed," he resumed. "I went to your Arcadian gathering for a soothing change. I hoped to secure a little restful pleasure. Instead, I saw a lot of uninteresting people making uninteresting fools of themselves, and I must needs, forsooth, behave like the

greatest fool of all by descending to their level and playing the buffoon."

"I perceive you are troubled," Ward said, "by the idea that they did not appreciate your — humour." He took another piece of toast. "You are quite right. They did n't."

"I presume that in this chosen and very grimy country a jest has to be translated into mud before it is appreciated," the old man rejoined. "But I am not worried by the inability of your friends to understand me. They are not the only people who have failed in that simple undertaking. I am not worried at all. I am merely disappointed. I am disappointed especially with Thorpe. I imagined that that venerable patriarch ruled his flock benignly, if a trifle heavily. Yet consider the scene with that atrocious woman who railed at him, and cursed him. What deplorable iniquity has passed between them, that such a bêtise could be possible? Bah! one loses faith even in those whom one imagines to be too insipid to be wicked. Eh? Your Arcadia is but a sordid deception, your venerable vicar a disgusting fraud."

"I will explain the incident which is worrying you," Ward said coldly.

Miss Sands came into the room. She glanced at Lord Daventry, and, intimidated by his severe aspect, crossed, with a deprecating air, to Ward.

"A letter from the vicar," she explained. "It

has just come. I thought you would like to have it at once, as it may be important."

Ward took the letter. "Thank you."

Miss Sands withdrew, acutely conscious that the old man was watching her, ferociously.

"You will excuse me?" Ward asked, opening the letter. He read it carefully, then placed it on the table.

"The vicar tells me," he said, "that he has just heard from his son, in Colorado."

"Thorpe has taken the trouble to write to you about such a detail as that?" Lord Daventry enquired, incredulously.

Ward nodded. "It is seven years since Harold Thorpe left England. This is the first letter that he has written to his father during the last five of them. It is scarcely a detail, you perceive. It is an event. The vicar did not even know where his son was, or whether he had gone under altogether. He made rather a mess of things here, you know, and it did n't seem likely that he would make a brilliant success of anything anywhere. Yet he 's managed to do pretty well. He 's struck gold-mines —"

"A very sensible proceeding," Lord Daventry observed. "I begin to respect Mr. Harold Thorpe."

Ward continued. "He intimates that he is coming home soon to try the rôle of a millionaire."

"I once met in America — in New York —" Lord Daventry said, "a man who had struck gold-mines — in Colorado also, I believe. He seemed very prosperous. Millionaires frequently do. But he had his little worries. He had been foolish enough to marry — not wisely, but too well. His wife possessed everything that a man desires in a woman — except womanliness. In all other respects, she was charming. Very charming. She certainly had unusual beauty and distinction."

"He told you so?" Ward asked, raising his eyebrows.

"I told myself so," Lord Daventry replied. "Quite fortuitously, I saw her. She was a remarkable woman, peculiarly alluring." He became reflective. "I remember her very well, though I saw her once only. She impressed me as a most creditable modern version of Cleopatra. I have often regretted that Cleopatra herself flourished somewhat prematurely. I have missed the crowded hour of glorious life that she adopted as her specialty and brought to such a state of seductive perfection. Women — bah! they are merely the counters with which men play the game of love. Cleopatra was not a woman. She was sex incarnate, temptation made tangible. Even your saintship would have been influenced by those slumbrous eyes, illimitable wells, flooded with the distilled dew of passion." His own grey-green eyes seemed to darken

and glow. Suddenly he laughed, thinly. "Quite a pretty metaphor," he said.

"It seemed so to me," Ward agreed drily.

"Shall we return to our original discussion?" Lord Daventry suggested. "You were going to explain to me the peculiar relations between Nancy, the inebriate, and Thorpe, the invertebrate."

"Curiously," Ward said, "this letter has some connection with the subject. You know so much about our little affairs, and imagine so much more, that I may as well tell you the truth and prevent you from guessing uncharitably. It is not the vicar who is to blame, but the man who seems to have become a millionaire — Harold Thorpe."

"A case of the sins of the sons being visited on the fathers?" Lord Daventry interposed. "Harold has eaten the grapes, and the vicar's teeth are set on edge. Eh?"

"Yes. Harold stayed at the vicarage for some months before he went to America. He was at a loose end. He 'd lost his position in the North as a mining engineer, — drink, I think, — so he hung round here till something turned up."

"And the first something was Nancy?" the old man suggested.

"She was a pretty girl then," Ward said. "Simple and affectionate, but with an inherited tendency, I believe, to be too easily influenced by the pleasure of the moment. We are beginning to

understand heredity better than we did a few years ago, but it still counts. We don't say that a man was born a drunkard, or a woman a wanton, because drunkenness or wantonness appeared to be a family heirloom. We merely say that they were born with certain physiological and psychical dispositions, which may lead to regrettable developments." He laughed. "The difference is valuable in theory, but not very noticeable in practice. It simply means that a man's grandfather may be quite as important as his father."

"True," Lord Daventry observed. "I sometimes realize the responsibility quite acutely. What, I ask myself, have I handed down to you? Faith, hope, charity, of course. I am afraid I am undoubtedly blamable for your angelic disposition. But what else have I passed on to you? What lurks beneath that marble surface of restraint and orderly habit? Eh? I sometimes wonder, John. Do fires glow within the walls of ice? Does the heart throb, the brain dream? Even a small folly would relieve my anxiety; for if you are not a miserable sinner, as the family tradition demands, surely my grey hairs shall go down in sorrow to the grave. I am old now, and the memory of my early vices will not support unassisted the reputation of our house. Your brother George" — he shrugged his shoulders — "does his best, but he is a mere fool. The trivialities of a conventional idiot

are painful. I relied upon you to bring us into notoriety with some really illustrious esclandre." There was mockery in his voice, but not in the eyes, which seemed to probe for some hidden wound, that might fester if ignored.

Ward resumed calmly. "Harold Thorpe met Nancy. The girl fell in love with him. He was a big, burly man, with a pleasant face and blue eyes — not wilfully a cad, but careless. He had nothing to do, and plenty of time to do it in. Nancy was certainly very pretty and attractive. They met frequently. Nobody knew about it at the time, but, of course, everybody did afterwards. Well, Thorpe went away. A few months later, there was a baby. It died within a week. Nancy altered terribly, poor girl. She did n't leave the neighbourhood, and would n't let the vicar or anybody else help her. But she just went to the bad. She continued to live with her father: I dare say he gave her a rough time, but he did n't turn her out. He was hurt at the ironworks two years ago — frightfully hurt. You 've never seen a man with the flesh ripped off by molten metal, have you? Well, he died. The company offered to pay Nancy five shillings a week if she did n't bring an action for compensation. She lives on that, and what she gets — in other ways. A sad life. Nobody has any influence over her. It has been a sorry business for the vicar. He feels that he is responsible

for the tragedy, somehow; that he should have been able to prevent his own son from bringing such unhappiness into the parish. He has brooded over it ever since. Heaven knows how often and with what patience he has tried to help Nancy, and bring her back to some conception of self-respect. She merely reviles him, brutally, hideously. Yet he even wanted her to live at the vicarage, as his daughter, his son's wife. That 's all. I thought it was better for you to know the truth."

Lord Daventry nodded. "I suppose it was rather fine for Thorpe to wish the girl to live with him as his daughter. But he would have needed all his Christian fortitude if she 'd accepted. Eh? No two things in the universe are so widely and hopelessly separated as two human beings, of whom one has breeding, and the other has n't. Whatever you do, John, avoid the Nancy type, especially at the most alluring stage of prettiness and simplicity. Only a lady knows how to be kissed. The embraces of mere females are Dead Sea fruit: you have n't even the pleasure of enjoying them before you pay for them. Weariness, John: unutterable weariness."

"Do you know anything," Ward asked abruptly, "of Lady Winter?" Oddly, his grandfather's remarks had caused him to think of her.

"Lady Winter? Yes, I have heard of her. Kent family, I believe: good blood, but small income. Married a City man — one of those fellows who get

knighted for being in the way at a royal function; poor blood, but large income. He died some time ago. Widow wanders. Very attractive, it is said, but manages her own affairs and does n't advertise. Why do you ask? Eh? "

" She is staying down here with her sister," Ward answered. " I have not seen her. I was merely curious."

Lord Daventry was interested. " Her sister has a place here? " he asked.

Ward laughed. " Not a large place. Her husband is employed at the ironworks, and they live economically. Mrs. Harrington's boy died a few days ago. You remember calling at the vicarage with me and asking the vicar to see her? Lady Winter has come down for a little while to cheer her up."

" Odd how families drift about and change their status," the old man said. " It would be interesting to know why Mrs. Harrington married an ironworks' employee. Her previous experience of a small income should have caused her to shun a marriage of inconvenience. Eh? After a few years, rigid economy palls, even if the husband does n't. Love and illusions in a cottage are very charming, but disillusionment can only be mitigated by a palace. The daily, unavoidable intimacy of the poor is immoral. It ought to be a criminal offence for married people to see each other more fre-

quently than once a week. Of course, they really should not live in the same county. Distance is the proper basis of all close affection. How can two people respect each other, or themselves, when they share three meals a day and have only one bathroom? It is impossible." He rose. "I do not even respect Philpotts, though he is discreet. I know that he knows me too well: he is much more intimate with me than I am with myself. He does not respect me. He knows that he has become indispensable. I shall therefore be compelled to part with him. Yet I dread that separation. It will have the pangs, without the éclat, of a divorce. Besides, it is becoming fashionable to avoid divorces now. They have been so overdone by the vulgar that we can scarcely countenance them any longer. That is one thing for which I praise the press. In its efforts to pander to the lowest classes of the community, it requires so many prurient details that Society cannot possibly supply the demand. The mere rich have therefore crowded in, without discretion or distinction. Obviously, we cannot remain in such a gallery. We withdraw."

"My cue," Ward said, touching the bell. "I am afraid I shall not see you again till dinner. If you feel any craving for a quiet chat during the afternoon, don't hesitate to use Miss Sands. She is an admirable and intelligent listener."

Lord Daventry watched him as he went out, ob-

serving the easy movement, the poise of the head, the impression of resourcefulness.

"A man's grandfather may be quite as important as his father," he murmured. "Heaven help you, dear Saint John, when you begin to realize precisely how much you owe to your own affectionate grandfather."

Miss Sands, entering to remove the breakfast things, encountered a peculiarly savage glare, which distressed her.

CHAPTER IX

IN the comedy of life there is neither ill nor bad luck, but an exact adjustment of conditions. Midway through a sordid career, or on the threshold of a dark hovel of the dead — for even the grave takes rank from its inhabitant — the whiner may plead that fortune never flung to him the chances of a Carnegie or a Rockefeller. The reply is absolute: he lies, wilfully or witlessly. No jest of a lottery upbuilt those somewhat criticised philanthropists: they stand on such pedestals as their own hands raised. They fashioned wealth, not because opportunity came to them, but because they continued seeking till the opportunity was found. What they have, they gained because of what they are: it is their own, inwoven with their natures. But their happiness is moulded to an unvarying scale. Envy no man — nay, not even in his death. Do the wicked flourish like the green bay-tree? It is very just. They have their hour: and there is another still to come. The Mills of God have been grinding through the ages, delicately, precisely; and the millers are expert. The worth of the grain that you bring them shall be measured to you exactly,

in tears and laughter, joy of passion and bitterness of aching heart. Duke or dustman, courtesan or countess, you shall find the same fixed scale. Can you love sublimely? You shall prove the lower depths of hell. Has your life been fair, with palaces and purple, soft raiment and smooth days? Have a care for the nights, when the voice of a little son is stilled or the eyes of a wife are closed, and your heart shrivels. For the Mills of God have been grinding through the æons, delicately, precisely; and the millers are expert. They can number your seconds, and the seconds of your fate; and if a gap shows dimly, they can close it while you loiter, dreaming human dreams.

Ward was busy in the surgery till noon. Then, having to visit a patient on the road to Mow Hill, beyond Clayfield, he determined to ride, instead of taking the car or trap. He went to the stables and told Marple to saddle Solon; then, returning, went to his room and put on his riding breeches. As he was starting, Miss Sands, realizing that he would not be back for lunch, brought him a glass of milk, in which an egg had been beaten up. Thus fortified, he departed, without any reflection upon the numbering of seconds and the remorseless advance of destiny.

It was a clear day, cool and suave. As he rode, he considered the view, that his grandfather had so

often criticised; and it seemed good to him, in spite of the decay and neglect. Coal and iron were scarcely congruous with the nicer amenities of life. The perfume of roses may linger in summer gardens, trimmed and kept fair: the environment of work is harsher, yet distinctive. The smoke rising in the distance, the disorder and bareness around, carried their message of energy, of things done and in the doing. A workman may not toil in white linen and clean raiment: he must wear the garb of his calling. And so with the place that he dwells in. When the last mine is exhausted, and the furnaces flare no more, little by little the signs of the dead past shall be removed, and unloveliness cease.

Ward felt that he was in harmony with that littered land, with its people and its purpose. It was better to have a definite place and a definite plan, than to drift with the idlers: better to be identified with a community, to keep one's finger on the pulse of life, to share the common sorrow and the common gladness. Here, where men worked, there was work for men to do, selflessly, without parade, with little thanks and scanty record.

He rode on, at an easy pace. The rutted lanes had become friable with the milder weather and he left behind a small cloud of dust, which settled in the windless air as swiftly as the pounding hoofs renewed it. He took the shortest turns and bypaths, occasionally cantering across hedgeless fields or bar-

ren wasteland: but it was two hours before he reached the end of his journey and pulled up at a small cottage, old and solitary. He had not expected to be delayed; but the woman whom he had come to see was fretful and in pain. He stayed with her for a long time, indulgent and comforting; chatted with her; read to her, for she wished it, from the Bible — "cutting out Morrison," as he told himself with a smile. When he came away, the afternoon had gone.

He rode back. The stillness of the air, and the slowly decreasing light, had their effect in the trend of his thoughts, already influenced by the atmosphere of the cottage and the loneliness of the woman he had visited. Life seemed a strange invention, melancholy at the best. The narrow outlook of the multitude, the larger freedom of the few, were tragic with pain, with unsatisfied longings or futile regrets. The women who shall never be mothers, and feel the plucking of baby fingers at their breasts; the mothers who have no profit of their travail, but lose their little ones and rack their hearts, — what hosts could be gathered from those silent ones, who may not war against their destiny?

The perpetual pageant of life, with its garishness and shadows, moved him to wonder: he felt the craving that comes to all who see the tears in mortal things — the desire to comprehend; to rip the veil from semblance and know the im-

mutable real. The days passed, and the nights: but what was this time of which they were recording symbols? Sorrow passed, and joy: but what was this being which they expressed, lifting it from the Nirvana of stupor, visioning sleep with dreams?

Riding across the fields, he came within view of the Harrington house. In the summer it looked attractive, with the flowers and the green grass in front, the little orchard behind, and the creepers covering the walls. Now, small and bare, it seemed a sinister cage for a woman who had known something, at least, of life's graciousness in earlier days. Ward had never realized personal loss: his father had died when he was too young to be perplexed with mourning. But Mrs. Harrington's desolation irked him. What freak of pitiless fate had demanded just that one untested life, and given her henceforward the insistent companionship of pain? He checked himself in his thoughts: with the precision of the scientist, he objected to his own use of the idea of freakishness. Rather had the universe, in which the slightest detail is inexorably determined, combined, throughout its immensity, to produce this pitiful result — the stilling of a boy's heart, the breaking of a woman's. But why? What sowing of a far spring had resulted in this winter reaping?

He had come to a little pool, with a few gaunt trees throwing their reflections into the turbid water.

The Clayfield path ran by it, and a rough seat had been improvised for any tired wanderer who chose to rest, as at an oasis within a barren land. Ward's eye, roving, caught the glint of metal. He checked his horse and looked down, more closely: dismounting, he picked up a small gold pencil. He examined it, curiously, and found initials engraved on the side — E. W. Wondering who E. W. was, he put the pencil in his pocket, and, moved by a sudden impulse, sat down on the cracked bench. His horse, following him like a dog, nuzzled against his shoulder.

After a little while, he lit a cigar. Solon, disliking the light of the match and the aroma of the tobacco, withdrew. Ward did not turn his head: he knew the affectionate creature would not stray.

It was getting dark: the air was colder. He looked at the water, picturing that other pool which angels troubled, that sorrow might be relieved. Mrs. Harrington's face came before him, as he had seen it on the wild night of the storm, first, in the porch of his surgery, and later, when she listened to those heavy footsteps descending the creaking stairs. He imaged her husband's face, turgid, purple, as he had roused him from drunken slumber, harshly, perhaps, to communicate his cruel news. The gross body reappeared, the blood-shot eyes, as the drunkard lurched into the living-room, half realizing

what he had been told, and seeking confirmation. A strange mating, surely, between such a woman and such a man!

Smoking his cigar very slowly, and letting his thoughts drift unsteered, Ward waited for something which he knew was going to happen. The impulse which had moved him to sit down when he found the pencil, instead of remounting and riding away, was due to no casual desire, but to the curious power he seemed to possess, without comprehending it, of forecasting the immediate future.

Solon, wistful for home, whinnied and pawed the ground. He took no notice. Fate had prepared for him some drama, tragic or trivial. Already, on the stage of the overworld, it had been rehearsed; and some echo of the theme had been transmitted to him, faintly. Accepting the impression, without trying to explain it or render it more vivid, he waited for the public performance.

The curtain rose abruptly. A hand, heavy and harsh, was laid on his left shoulder. A voice, deep but not resonant, came to him as if from a distance.

"Don't move," it said, "or I'll break your damned neck."

"Evidently not light comedy," Ward reflected. Not a muscle had quivered.

The voice came again. "I'll break your damned neck anyway," it said. "But don't move if you want to live a few minutes longer."

Acquiescent, incurious, Ward gazed at the dull waters of the pool. This was merely the ordained prelude. The significance of the play would be apparent later.

"Speak, curse you!" The command came savagely. "Do you know who I am? Do you know why I 'm here — why I 'm going to kill you like the damned swine you are?"

Ward spoke meditatively. "I don't quite know why you are here, Harrington, but I shall find out."

"Yes, by God!" Harrington cried. "You 'll find out!"

Ward went on. "But you are not consistent. Always be consistent, Harrington. You mentioned that you proposed breaking my neck. A moment after, you suggested killing me like a pig. One does n't usually kill a pig by breaking its neck, I believe."

"No, it has its throat cut," Harrington said. "Perhaps you don't know, my fine gentleman, that I 've got my knife open in my hand, ready to drive it into that white throat of yours — a two-inch blade it 's got — enough to make a pretty gash. I opened it when I saw you — I meant to see you sooner or later, but I did n't know the pleasure 'd come so soon — and here, where it 's so quiet and lonely. The blade 's sharp, doctor. I 've ground it every night since —" He stopped, suddenly.

"So you knew my voice, did you?" he asked. "You recognized me? I thought you would. Aye, I thought you would."

"Not from your voice only," Ward said. "But there is a certain alcoholic taint in your breath which is suggestive, though scarcely pleasant. It would seem that I always meet you, Harrington, under these unpleasant conditions. The last time especially, I remember, there was the same taint — excessively nauseating. Perhaps you have forgotten the occasion to which I refer. You have no doubt been drunk so many times since then — if, indeed, you have ever permitted yourself to become approximately sober — that any particular occasion would naturally slip from your memory. Permit me to recall the circumstances to you. You were lying on your bed. Slumber had seized you so unexpectedly that you had omitted the formality of undressing. You were breathing stertorously. The blood-vessels of your head and neck were congested. You had had a debauch, and you were drunk — very drunk. In the meantime, your wife had gone out in the worst storm we have had for two years and had battled her way through the cold and the rain and the wind, in utter darkness, to fetch me, because her son was dying. We came back together. We could not save him. It was too late. But we relieved some of his pain. He died. And you were drunk."

Harrington had listened without interrupting. "Yes," he said. "You told me some of that before. You woke me up to tell me."

"I thought you ought to know," Ward said drily. "The event appeared to concern you."

"God!" the drunkard cried. His left hand, which he had not removed from Ward's shoulder, pressed down convulsively. It was some time before he spoke again. When he did so, his voice was like a hoarse whisper.

"You 're a hard man," he said. "You don't know what you did when you woke me up that night, and you don't care. But you killed something in me — something that was ME. I 'm Harrington, now, in a way. I 've got Harrington's body and Harrington's voice. I do his work and live in his house. I get up early in the morning and come back at night — like this. But I 'm dead. This body is a shell, a husk. It is n't real, it is n't solid. It 's a coffin, and all hell is writhing inside it. That 's your work."

"No," Ward said, curtly. "Your own."

"Call it the devil's," Harrington said. "That 'll fit both of us. I 'm not human, anyway, now. I 'm mad. You think I 've been drinking. I have. Brandy. I never used to touch brandy. Beer was good enough for me. Now I drink a bottle of brandy a day. I live on it. I have n't eaten a crumb since the night you woke me up. I can't.

I 've hardly slept. I just burn. That 's your work, again."

"I should put it down to the brandy," Ward said.

Harrington laughed aloud. "You fool! The brandy 's like water. It does n't scorch me. It helps to cool the flames. Can't you understand, you cruel beast, what you did for me that night? Can't you understand that if I kill you, as I 'm going to, I 'm not making you suffer one hundredth part of what you 've made me go through? But I 'll take a life for a life, by God! For you 've killed me. I 'm dead. Dead."

When Ward spoke, his voice had changed: the steel had gone out of it. "Not dead," he said. "But, by God's grace, your soul, perhaps, is being brought again to life. It may be, Harrington, that this was the purpose in all that has happened. A life for a life, you say? Yes, Walter's living soul for yours: his, unstained, back to its Creator and to peace, that yours may burst its cerements and come to its God-given resurrection."

There was silence. Then something like a sob escaped from Harrington. He withdrew his left hand from Ward's shoulder.

"Turn round, sir," he said.

Ward did so.

Harrington stretched out his right hand. "I had no knife," he said. "You see?"

Ward nodded. "I understand. You did not

mean to kill. You wanted to give me shock for shock — to repay me for my harshness that night? "

"Yes," Harrington said.

Ward looked at the pain-seamed face, the haunted eyes. "It was just," he said. "Yet I did not mean to be cruel — I don't know, though," he added. "Perhaps I did. I think I wanted to hurt you. I am sorry."

"I had no knife," Harrington repeated slowly. "But I might have killed you. I wanted to make you suffer; and there was murder in my heart. Perhaps I meant to strangle you. Aye, it might have come to that. I was mad. I will go home, sir."

A clear voice came through the gloom. "I was wondering how long you would be."

The two men turned. It was still light enough for Ward to see, though obscurely, the cloaked form of a woman. The height, the poise, suggested Mrs. Harrington: but the voice was different, in intensity, tone and pitch.

"I came to meet you, James," she continued. "You are late, I think."

"Yes, I 'm late," Harrington agreed. It did not occur to him to introduce Ward.

"Good-night, sir," he said. "I 'll remember meeting you." He turned away, without offering to shake hands.

Ward watched them as they walked along the

path together. He realized that this must be Mrs. Harrington's sister — Lady Winter. He wondered if she had overheard any of the strange conversation. Had she spoken as soon as she arrived, or had she been a witness for some minutes, fearing to intervene?

He recalled the little gold pencil that he had picked up. The initials engraved on it were E. W. Possibly it was hers: the W. might stand for Winter. He would ascertain her other name. The pencil, noticed as he rode, had been the cause of his dismounting. The impulse to stay had come after he picked it up. If it were really hers, she had been concerned, in some degree, both with the beginning and the end of the drama.

Solon, perplexed at the long delay, had drawn close to him, with half-human enquiry. He mounted and turned toward home.

It was a pity, he thought, that it had been so dark. He had not seen her eyes. He remembered that Morrison had said they were violet. Violet was an unusual colour. Yet he associated it, curiously, with her voice.

CHAPTER X

THE Sabbath Day — the Day of Rest.

The human heart, wayward and wild, can never know peace entirely. Even in joy there are inseparable threads of pain. Music has not been conceived that will not carry its undertones of sadness. Let the memory go back to the ordered days of a serene life, retracing each trivial incident, each larger achievement. If you have children, though they fulfil your hopes and occupy the place that you designed, flourishing, and caring for your affection, you shall not recall the nursery without a pang, nor without some strange emotion the trivial pomps and vanities of those little lives, with their unexpanded limits, their dependence, their supreme appeal. All change is inherently tragic. The familiar details of the past, insignificant at their happening, affairs of mere routine, stab sharply at their wilful or unwilful recollection. The furniture of a room in an abandoned house, the flowers or winter bareness of a garden, the winding paths within and without, become memorials of the dead, hallowed, but involved with heartaches. It needs no sadness of a desolated land to bring to an exile the sense

of tears: the wayfarers who watch from an emigrant ship the receding shores of their native country, — Erin or England, depopulated or too populous, — know no keener grief than the wanderer who comes again to his own community, of town or village, — the place where he sinned and loved before he grew to the stature of man's strength, — and finds but graves where he had remembered wedding-bells, and kindly eyes, and the voices of dear friends. Even the streets, perhaps, are altered. There are higher buildings, garish and prominent: old stone has been replaced by brick, simplicity by stucco. The mutability of life is not confined to men and women. The insentient also change. In the flux and fierce stress of the years, the temples of the flesh, and the temples built with hands, alike pass and are forgotten by a new generation.

The Day of Rest.

God gave it as a solace for all weary ones, that they might turn from toil and unloveliness, from idleness and folly, from self and the importunity of pain, to the thought of the steadfast and unfleeting, to the semblance and prefigurement of peace. For the Sabbath, still subject to the Son of Man, is a means, and not an end; a memorial, not of the past, but of the future, of the dawning of that Eighth Day when God, Himself resting no more, shall give rest at last to all His creatures.

Man, in his wisdom, is sometimes very stupid.

Too often, he paints his God as a Fiend, and his Fiend as a God. It is not unnatural that the young, confused, should sometimes turn to the powers of darkness, with their smiling faces and seductive ways, and avert their eyes from the gloomy frowns of the angels of light. How many children have been crushed beneath the sombreness of a Sabbath desecrated by its very observance! Only in after years, when their sins have taught them charity, and their despair has taught them hope, and their loneliness has led them to faith, they shall listen again to the sound of bells coming across the fields, and comprehend and reverence the symbolism of the Cross.

"Your church bells," Lord Daventry remarked at breakfast, "are energetic but tinkly. It seems to me that in a district so idyllic as this, consecrated to the lure of lucre no less than to the love of Heaven, you should show your local pride and sense of fitness by installing a huge steam-siren in your antiquated belfries. Eh? How masterful and musical would be its summons! How easily your miners and work-people would learn to associate the service of the Church with their own devoted service in the mines and foundries. It would have the advantage also of suggesting the preliminary horrors of the Day of Judgment, and thus furnish a wholesome corrective for any tendency to light-heartedness or indifference. I confess that I stand in awe

of the Day of Judgment. The popular idea invests it with a publicity which is revolting to a sensitive disposition. All judicial proceedings should be held in camerâ. Eh?"

Ward smiled. "Let us postpone the Day of Judgment till dinner," he suggested, "and consider the possibilities of this morning. Are you going to church?"

"Are you?"

"Yes."

"Then I will sacrifice myself," Lord Daventry said. "After all, it is advisable to encourage these village industries. But I hope Thorpe won't preach. That little curate is much more vivacious. Eh?"

"Morrison always preaches in the morning," Ward assured him. "The vicar reserves himself for the evening."

"Then we will sit at the feet of Morrison and be uplifted — though curacy is really very immoral," Lord Daventry added. "One ought not to subject an amiable young man, with his character yet unformed, to the perpetual temptation of posing as a sinful expert, capable of leading the blind, strengthening the feeble, comforting the sorrowful, uplifting the meek, disgusting the self-satisfied, rebuking the stiff-necked, and intoning melodiously. When he regards his own astounding virtues, he must inevitably fall in love with vice, which has all

the charms of the unknown, though he is supposed to comprehend it thoroughly, that he may warn the uninitiated, who are trying to scorch themselves. How can he be a guide, philosopher and friend, when his morals are supposed to be unimpeachable? You might as well expect a man who knows nothing of German to indicate the pitfalls of that simple and euphonious language. Eh? Besides, you don't learn a thing by simply looking at it, by knowing that it exists. You must handle it, breathe it, live in the atmosphere. It is ridiculous to expect an innocent and tender curate to help, from the depths of his blameless heart and simple imagination, the sin-worn veterans of life. He is quite incompetent, of course. The system which produces him is sadly futile. There ought to be a strict test, a graduated scale of experience for clerical appointments and promotions. Covetousness and general depravity would suffice for the priesthood. A candidate for a canonry should be required to furnish satisfactory evidence of more definite wickedness, while from a bishop nothing less than a public esclandre would be accepted. Then, indeed, a convict would at last feel at home in a cathedral, and our rectories would be real refuges for wrecked lives."

"The service begins at eleven," Ward said, without comment. "Would you prefer to walk, or shall I drive you?"

"I will walk," the old man said. "It will at

least show that I go of my own free-will, and buoy me up if Morrison talks about predestination."

The two walked over together, first by the lane, and then, branching off, by the field-path. It was a grey day, depressing and moist; and the landscape seemed raw. A pall hung over the Chayle colliery, of which the shaft-wheel and scaffolding could be seen beyond the crest of the hill that faced the house. In the other direction, the chimneys of the dotted cottages exhaled smoke, slowly: it hung in the air, unable to climb, and drifted outward, gradually fading at the ravelled edges, while the centre remained opaque. Newchurch, viewed in perspective as an irregular cluster of buildings, dominated the skyline dwarfishly. As they came nearer, it diffused itself.

The old man was silent. Even the churchyard, damp and dismal, remote from all joy of life or suggestion of ease and tranquillity after travail, struck no spark from his flinty cynicism. When the sun shines and the air is warm, the dormitory of the dead is not gruesome; the children of earth lie relaxed, companioned and unterrified; the awakening is timed. But when the mould is wet, and the headstones drip, the resurrection of the body seems a far dream, too frail to sustain the intellect in its halting flights. Imagination droops morbidly to the unloveliness of decay; the exposed skulls grin, the denuded bones mock the phantasy of argent

limbs. The universe swings its stars, day and night are strained through a sieve, for the pleasure of the imperial worm — a despot to be dethroned by no revolt. Lord Daventry pictured himself in oak, with its encasing shells. The first spadeful of earth fell heavily — no, there would be no filling in of a six-foot grave. He would lie on a stone shelf in the vault of his fathers, contaminated from the first by their older corruption — A grim warehouse, this massive vault, well-guarded and well-guarding. But sooner or later the worm would get in — He shrugged his shoulders.

As they entered the church, the bell ceased. Lord Daventry walked down the aisle with the dignified tread of a miserable sinner familiar with sacred edifices. The scattered congregation watched him with reverence. His grey hair, elaborately marcelled; his grey trousers, pressed and perfect; his grey frock-coat, with grey silk lapels, and his prestige as a peer, made him holy in their eyes. They watched him as he knelt, and omitted to scan the choir critically when it emerged from the vestry, pacing statelily, shepherded by Morrison. The little curate, august in his red Oxford hood, visible representative of the historic continuity of the Church, pregnant with apostolic authority, caught Ward's glance, and lowered infinitesimally the lid of his left eye.

The service commenced. One by one the petitions

of priest and people were voiced: confession and absolution, pleading and psalms of praise, prayers that have echoed through the centuries, hymns beautiful with the associations that have gathered round them — all the mighty or trembling words went out to the living God who sustains and interprets and *is* His universe. Lord Daventry was astonished at the vital power that throbbed through the fixed formulæ and phrases, making them wonderful. The dismal, depressing day was forgotten: the wet mould of the churchyard, the gravestones that seemed to exude clamminess, became negligible details in the superb scheme of enduring, undying life.

Morrison ascended the pulpit-steps and faced the concentrated gaze of the congregation. Lord Daventry realized that the little man, with his bright, earnest face, represented righteousness. Unimmune from the faults and subject to the temptations of his fellows, it was his mission to set an example of self-conquest and to draw quietly day by day, prominently week by week, the attention of the forgetful to the ideals of their race. Thousands of men like the little curate were upholding — some with weak fingers — the banner of duty and high endeavour. It were easy to laugh at their individual frailties and imperfections — the inexperience of some, the unworthiness of others, even the Oxford manner which sometimes distresses the critical or the envious. But in their public protest against evil, their

solemn proclamation that the faith of their fathers was still vital and divine, they became imposing and significant. It was no longer Morrison of Magdalen, Jones or Talbot of Trinity or Jesus, who inhabited a pulpit and preached, perhaps, to men of larger intellect and women acquainted with the hidden ways of sorrow. It was the representative of the nation's conscience.

The curate took as his text, separating the phrase from its context, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth"; and in a clear, musical voice discussed the meaning of law and order, the impossibility of a cause existing without the effect. As a man sowed, assuredly he should reap; and the grain of his reaping should be seed for other sowings. Life feeds life. The mystery of penitence and pardon was indicated, not as suggesting a shirking of responsibilities incurred, of payment due and demanded, but as involving regeneration, an insight into the divine view, recognition and complete acceptance of divine justice. None could discard their sins at any moment, and start afresh, free and untrammelled. But they could rise into a higher universe of thought and faith, from which the old life, with all its errors, and the consequences of those errors, could be seen in true proportion. A child of the slums, playing in a thronged street, eager to live to the full his little life, might have his foot crushed by a heavy wagon. The grown man, though he had passed for-

ever from the slums and left far behind the ways of neglected childhood, must still go crippled for that early mischance. But the more he had grown toward the full stature of manhood, the more completely he could reconcile himself to that enduring payment for an early blunder. It was the mark of his own unity. Without that unity, he could not exist; could not have climbed to his new position of knowledge and insight; could not hope to climb to a point still higher. Comprehending his weakness as a child, he would not blame himself for the child's slip, the child's carelessness, the child's acceptance of the risks of the crowded street. But the consequence remained. So, with penitence, there was forgiveness of sins; and with forgiveness, remission of punishment. For punishment is a penalty forced upon a stubborn and rebellious mind. When the mind ceases to resist, and accepts the necessity of justice, there is no longer punishment, which depends upon resentment. There are merely inevitable consequences, which endure and must be endured. There is no easy way out from the House of Sin. All debts must be paid in full.

Lord Daventry listened attentively, recognizing the curate's earnestness, his desire to make clear the lesson of responsibility, of unescapable payment for every purchase. The old man smiled at the imperfect logic, the clumsy illustration, the incomplete development of the theme; but it was not

wholly with amusement that his thin lips twitched, as he recalled his own purchases in life's bazaar, and the payments that were not yet completed. If he were permitted to settle the account personally, he would not grumble. But sometimes the bill was presented, not to the one who had contracted the debt, but to the heirs of his estate, the inheritors of his wealth or poverty. He glanced at Ward, and perceived that his grandson's eyes were directed to the left: following the line, he saw, several pews forward, on the opposite side, two ladies, dressed in black.

The day was brighter when the service concluded and the congregation streamed slowly from the church. Ward, with a word to Lord Daventry, went into the vestry to speak with Morrison about the old woman at Mow Hill. When he rejoined his grandfather, they walked down the winding path to the gate. Lord Daventry observed, coming down another diagonal path, the two ladies to whom Ward had unconsciously directed his attention during the sermon. They all met at the gate. Ward took off his hat. Lord Daventry, raising his own hat, gazed curiously at one of the faces.

Mrs. Harrington stopped. "Dr. Ward, let me introduce you to my sister."

Ward, bowing, gazed into Lady Winter's violet eyes.

He did not speak for a little while, then, remem-

bering his grandfather, he completed the circle of introductions.

Lady Winter in many ways resembled her sister. She was slender in form, and slightly above medium height. The contour of her face, with its almost perfect proportions, suggested the relationship: but, unlike Mrs. Harrington's, it retained the softness and the colour of girlhood and was unlined. Her hair had perplexing tints of bronze and gold, while her sister's was a simple dull brown. Her violet eyes, unusually large, seemed slumbrous, indifferent. Ward wondered how they would look, lustrous, unleashed, vivid with passion. Coldly, he glanced at her lips.

Lord Daventry, surveying her with an air of polite aloofness, was considering, critically, impressions suddenly revived. When the process of association and reconstruction was completed, he found himself picturing a large room, brilliant with lights, susurrant with vague babble, thronged with men and women, who, released from the boredom or enchantment of the theatre, desired to eat and drink; to continue to live, to tempt, perhaps, new variations of old experiences. At a small round table, he perceived, clearly, two men: one, stalwart, blond, barely middle-aged; the other, old, somewhat shrivelled, with an aquiline nose — indubitably, himself. At another table, he saw a woman, slender, beautiful, with strange, violet eyes —

Calmly, with the same air of detachment, he continued to gaze at Lady Winter.

She was speaking. Ward, listening, perceived that her voice was not only musical and soft, but that it had also a peculiar timbre, which suggested, irresistibly, a colour; and involved with the colour, a pervading sense of sexuality.

"It is curious that I have not met you before, Lord Daventry; but I shall probably meet you again before long. Lady Normacott has asked me to stay with her in June."

"You know my mother?" Ward asked, astonished.

"I met Lady Normacott in London."

"I begin to realize," Lord Daventry said, "that the only way to escape from the unexpected is to expect it. I certainly did not imagine that I should meet here, in this simple, Arcadian neighbourhood, any individual so complicated and sophisticated as a friend of my daughter-in-law must inevitably be. The rencontres of life are certainly strange."

To himself, he said: "This, undoubtedly, is the charming lady whom I saw at Bishop's — *not* accompanied by her husband. And Lilian knows her. She has sent her an invitation — " His lips twitched, slightly.

"If they were not strange," Lady Winter observed, "they would become monotonous. I dislike monotony."

"It would be impossible to call our first meeting

monotonous," Lord Daventry said. He added, enquiringly, "You have but recently returned from America?"

She lifted her eyebrows. "A year ago."

"Probably," Lord Daventry remarked, "you found much to interest you in that country of much interest. I myself returned two years ago. But my impressions are still vivid."

"It is almost odd," she said pensively, "that we did not meet there. In a large country, there is so much room for accidental encounters."

Lord Daventry agreed. "It is only when people live in the same hotel," he suggested, "that they never see each other. You and I, wandering through half a continent, and concealed amongst a population of ninety millions, possibly stood side by side without realizing the importance of the incident. Yet it seems to me," he added deliberately, "that I could scarcely forget any encounter, however slight, with — Lady Winter."

She smiled. "Is that a compliment, or an innuendo?"

"A mere statement of fact," Lord Daventry said.

After standing for a little while at the gate of the churchyard, they had been walking very slowly on. Now, they had reached the parting of the ways.

"I return home shortly," Lord Daventry observed. "But I hope to see you again in June.

It will be a perfect godsend to have an intelligent person in the house. Lilian possesses an instinct for fatuousness. She calls it eccentricity. Eccentricity, she considers, constitutes genius. As she worships genius, and I myself never issue any invitations, our house-parties are a trifle dull. Eh, John? — You, Lady Winter, with your contempt for monotony, will cheer us up. I will not say good-bye. Au revoir."

He bowed. Ward, quite silent, lifted his hat. The two ladies, with more than a mile still to be traversed, began to walk briskly. The two men — the old, and the young; the blasé and the untempted — turned toward home, each busy with his own thoughts. Lord Daventry reflected upon the irony of life, upon the exactness of destiny, which is called fortuitousness. He, alone, perhaps, in England, knew with some completeness the history of this woman, with her manifold experiences, discreetly separated from present notoriety by the Atlantic. And it was he who had been destined to meet her, in this remote district, so alien from her usual environment. It was certainly humorous that his daughter-in-law should have invited her to Daventry, where he could amuse himself by studying a personality of such exceptional interest.

To Ward, the way home was lit by large, slumbrous eyes. In the air was the music of a voice, low, soft, peculiarly caressing.

PART II

BABYLON

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BABYLON

CHAPTER I

LADY NORMACOTT did not deserve her father-in-law's disparagement.

She was a woman of much charm and dignity; kindly, though not demonstrative; and still comparatively young. Yet the years had left their record in sufficient measure; there were many little lines beneath the eyes; her forehead was no longer smooth; and a grey tinge showed through the brown of her beautiful hair.

Her life had not been free from tragic episodes, though the poignancy of painful memories had become dulled as she settled down to the routine of making a large income as inconspicuous as possible. Married before her first season was completed, she had been busy with the imperious exactions of a nursery while the associations of her own dolls and childish toys still lingered. She loved her husband. In subtle activity of mind, in winsomeness of way and mood, he had revived the finer traditions of his

erratic race. His friends asserted, with the melancholy pleasure of those who contemplate an inevitable catastrophe, that he had the charm which seemed a heritage of the wickedest and wildest of the Wards. Whether he would have justified their pessimism, is a matter merely of curious surmise. He had taken but a few overt steps, — indeed, had scarcely joined the throng of the world's revellers, — when an accident in the hunting field put an end to all criticism and speculation. Carried home with a broken back, he lingered astonishingly for three weeks, preserving, through the agony of that long vigil, a courtesy, almost a debonairness, of manner which brought to his wife's eyes the tears that had been denied to estrangement and infidelity. Something of amusement gleamed in his own grey eyes as he watched the sunlight of the day, or the softer glow of the shaded lamps at night, knowing that he would never again walk abroad in the warm, lit air, or tempt fortune within walls, staking youth and gold against the usual futilities. He had played with fate, and fate had euchred him in the first game. Well, it were no use grumbling at the cards. He had lost, and must pay. Better to settle his debts with a smile, than with a snarl.

They buried him in the great vault in Daventry churchyard, with much stately ceremonial. Then the county returned to its placid ways. Lord Daventry, having gazed upon his dead son's face, flung

a taunt at the bereaved widow and secluded himself in his apartments. Emerging, he apologized politely for the rudeness, substituting an edged epigram. Throughout the funeral observances, he conducted himself irreproachably. When the vault had one more inhabitant, securely sheltered; when the last carriage had driven away and the little village was left to its customary silence, its sunshine, and its dead, — he drove back to the old, ivied Hall, and dismissed his valet for assuming a melancholy air.

"Very irritating and impertinent," he said. "You may take six months' wages, and leave to-night. Write your own character and I will sign it."

The man went, and upon the strength of his testimonial immediately secured a new situation, with extravagant wages. He was succeeded by Philpotts. On one of the rare occasions when he had been known to talk, Philpotts had asserted that Lord Daventry never regretted his son's death, since he — Philpotts — had been the direct and indispensable result. Thus great events may hinge on mere details. Lord Normacott had been dead for twenty-three years. During twenty-three years, the indispensability of Philpotts had become a legend, steadily enlarging itself. It was now monumental.

Lady Normacott had suffered. Many women may pass with cheerfulness through the day, yet find the

discipline of the vacant nights a hard training. She had her children, however, and was comforted. They gave her relief from brooding, and added, in due time, their own complementary gifts of care.

George, the eldest, was known by his father's courtesy title. He was a dull boy, unemotional; neither vicious nor deliberately virtuous. Lord Daventry, from the first, called him a fool; later, an expletive fool; and finally, unwilling to coin more epithets, he referred to him, with a shrug of the shoulders and a pause, merely as George — a name which became so completely identified with its owner that it at once conveyed his qualifications and general attributes. As he grew older, he developed a trend toward sensuality of a sordid, unoriginal type. The boy was sent down from Oxford; muddled away two years at an army crammer's; and then assumed the rôle of a man about town. Lady Normacott lived in constant fear — concealed but disconcerting — that he would bring home a chorus girl to share with her the name that she had borne alone for so many years. This achievement was so strikingly unoriginal that it would obviously appeal to his temperament.

John, the younger son, had shown different inclinations. Quiet and self-contained, he had altered little in character during boyhood and youth. In spite of his reserve — or perhaps, because of it — he had been popular at Eton. Lord Daventry, dis-

gusted with George and his Oxford stupidities, had insisted upon the younger boy going to Cambridge, "where he would n't be handicapped by his brother's reputation for idiocy." He was accordingly entered — his own name slightly influencing the choice — at St. John's. In his second year, he secured his place in the 'Varsity eight and experienced the pleasure of pursuing from Putney to Mortlake a boat which he did not see from the moment the starter's pistol was fired until the race was over. The following year, the order was reversed and for a brief period he was a portion of eight heroes and a coxswain. He came down with a First in Natural Science, and a determination, bewildering to his mother and his grandfather, to study medicine.

"Why medicine?" Lord Daventry demanded.

"Why not?" Ward asked.

"It is n't usual."

"Precisely. But I prefer not to be simply — usual."

The old man regarded him thoughtfully. "You have an allowance, which I can augment. Why not the Diplomatic Service, or the Bar, or Parliament? Eh?"

"Or nothing at all?" John suggested. "It is an easy profession. George seems to be making a brilliant success of it."

"This is not a case," Lord Daventry returned, "of — " He shrugged his shoulders and paused

slightly — "George. You have brains. I should like you to do something sensible in this very silly world."

"I propose to," Ward said. "Something better worth doing, in my opinion, than imitating the cacklers in the House of Commons."

"Very well," Lord Daventry said. "Make an ass of yourself, if you will. I offer you a career. You prefer to be an undertaker's pimp. Go and pimp."

Ward went. He secured his M.B., his M.D., and his hospital experience. Ultimately, he had settled at Newchurch, selecting the dreary district, as he had chosen his profession, without regarding the protests of his grandfather, or any preferences except his own. And Lord Daventry, admiring him for the exhibition of will-power, visited him regularly for the congenial purpose of gibing at things local and universal.

Lady Normacott's third child was a daughter, Ethel. Less reserved than John, she resembled him in many ways and cherished for him an affection which had its roots in the close intimacy of their childhood. Except for a brief interval spent at a convent-school in France, she had remained at home — for Daventry had always been her home. The Hall was big enough, as Lord Daventry had observed at his son's marriage, "to shelter several families of fools"; and he confidently expected that

the present Lord Normacott would soon attempt to furnish it partially in that way.

During his Eton and Cambridge days, Ward had naturally spent the greater part of his vacations with his own people, and the affection between his sister and himself had been strengthened by the close companionship, by their common interests, and corresponding characters. But since his prolonged absence, first in London and then at Newchurch, Ethel had drawn nearer to her mother, gradually comprehending the sadness now inherent in the life of the older woman, perplexed and alarmed by George's misconduct and the ominous outlook for the future. Lady Normacott had been made acquainted with care at an age so early that the novelty of her experiences at first obscured reflection and regret. But these had soon become more definite and distressing. Her nature, naturally emotional, had developed until the acute stage was reached. With the increase of intensity, there was a narrowing of scope: the whole of her thoughts and affections were concentred upon her children. She watched them with a tenderness almost morbid: when they were away from her, she suffered keenly. Their attitude toward herself, their responsiveness or imagined indifference, caused her perpetual disquietude. Her face, losing its softness, grew wistful: her nerves, overstrained, began to torment her. Fortunately, her commonsense, aided by a few

pointed remarks from Lord Daventry, came to her rescue. She realized that it was necessary to find some distraction, some interest which, while making slight demands upon energy and emotion, would serve to bridge the gaps in her life, occupying her mind with more mechanical employment and relieving the dangerous tendency to brood. Searching for something spacious yet unimportant, promising variety and amusement, but no strenuous appeals, she selected modern literature — as she conceived it. In such an atmosphere, her brain would find a soothing and agreeable narcotic.

She began to cultivate the society of those men and women who specialized in the obvious and so had ample leisure to escape obscurity. Occasionally, a sportsman drifted into the circle, an explorer or a mere globe-trotter, if a book of memoirs had been issued or was supposed to be contemplated. The house was now full of such people. More reputations coruscated at Daventry than were usually found wrecked in the drift of a London week. Lady Winter, who had chosen to remember an early and informal invitation, was on a different footing; Lady Normacott had heard her described as an enigma, and she had long desired to add an enigma to her collection. Yet Lady Winter owed some, at least, of her welcome to the unwarranted report that she was preparing a vivacious book dealing with her American experiences. It was understood

vaguely that she had had American experiences. She had already gained a reputation as a humorist by not contradicting the statements, attributed to her by a successful morning paper, that American women were charming, in spite of their husbands; that American men always married in haste and repented in Nevada; and that Missouri, true to her traditions, was steadily digging up the Tree of Knowledge, though not quite sure where it was buried. Lady Normacott was amused by these remarks, which she failed to comprehend: they therefore did not bore her. She admitted that she was curious with regard to the Missouri saying, and was not enlightened by being told that Missourians also were curious people.

"Lady Winter," she said to her daughter, "is undoubtedly very clever. Nobody quite understands her."

She was sitting in her boudoir, in the afternoon of a warm day, trying not to think. Ethel had brought her a letter, which had come by the second post.

"Never mind Lady Winter," the girl said. "Read your letter. It 's from John. That 's why I brought it up myself. Shall I open it for you?"

Lady Normacott held the letter in her hand, turning it over.

"I wonder what he wanted to write about?" she said.

"Why not find out?" Ethel suggested.

"I hope —" Lady Normacott began, and went on slowly, altering the sentence: "Perhaps he is not well?"

"You know John would n't write to you to say he had a headache," her daughter pointed out. "Do open the letter, mother."

"I expect," Lady Normacott said resignedly, "that he has broken down through overwork. It is quite possible that he has brain fever. I was convinced when he first went to Newchurch that something like this was inevitable."

"He may even be dead," Ethel said gravely. "He would be sure to write to you and break the news gently, would n't he?"

Lady Normacott reflected, and then opened the letter.

"He is coming home," she announced after a moment. "He is quite well, he says, but would like a change. I expect he wants to be brightened up a little. It is fortunate we have a few people in the house. He will enjoy meeting them."

Ethel had picked up the letter. "Oh, he is coming to-night. I am so glad."

"John never comes to-morrow," Lady Normacott remarked, profoundly.

There was a tap at the door. Lord Daventry, receiving permission, entered.

"I have a note," he said, "from John. He has suddenly determined — "

"Yes; he has written to me," Lady Normacott said.

"May I ask," Lord Daventry enquired, "merely as a matter of idle curiosity, where you intend to put him? Eh? The house is so full of your amiable poetlings and their amiable wives that I really don't quite see — "

"He can have George's room," Lady Normacott said.

"No." Lord Daventry spoke sharply. "It would be criminal to put an intelligent being into a room sacred to the associations of such a charming person as — " He shrugged his shoulders, and paused — "George. I refuse to permit it."

"The other rooms are occupied," Lady Normacott observed, a little stiffly.

"Then John had better put up in the village. It would be appropriate for my grandson to stay at an inn, while his own home is flooded with fools."

"John shall have his old room," Ethel decided. "I only use it as a dressing-room, and it can soon be fixed up for him."

"Very well," Lord Daventry agreed. "That is better. But I wish, Lilian," he added, to his daughter-in-law, "that you would not try to turn the house into a sardine-tin. You suffer fools rather too gladly."

"It is perhaps better," Lady Normacott said gently, "than some other kinds of suffering."

"A feminine sophism," Lord Daventry rejoined, "or, if not a sophism, certainly feminine, and therefore ridiculous." He withdrew, somewhat hastily.

Ethel, standing by her mother, bent down and kissed her. "If everything women do is ridiculous," she said, "love must be screamingly idiotic, must n't it?"

Lady Normacott stroked her daughter's hand. "Dear," she replied with wisdom, "men are sometimes far more feminine, really, than women."

CHAPTER II

IN the beautiful garden, fair women and brave men of letters loitered, pacing slowly; or still more restfully, reclined in willow chairs, sheltered by awnings from the summer sun. It was a time for musing and light converse, for tea and its gentle inspiration, for biscuits and attenuated bread and butter. Little cups, delicate as moulded rose-petals, were handed round. The Poet Who Had Wandered asserted that he could detect a faint, elusive odour — a soupçon of Souchong — mingling with the scents of myriad flowers. It reminded him of his journeyings in the painted Orient, of his voluntary exile for so many years at the ends of the world. He added, that he had learnt much in suffering that he hoped to teach in song.

The Poet Who Had Remained at Home observed that he had learnt much in song that he hoped to teach in suffering. He did not intend this as a mere parody of a platitude.

Ward enquired, in suffering to whom? To himself, or to his readers?

The Unexiled answered, to both: for to suffer was to be ennobled.

The Poet Who Had Wandered agreed: he him-

self, with one foot in the Philippines and the other treading, in fancy, his native shores, had been aware of the exaltation of melancholy. It was in such a mood that he had composed his Ode to My Tailor, to accentuate, as it were, the contrast between the complexity of civilization and the simplicity of savagery. For the primitive savage existed — when he was not extinct — without clothes, without morals, and without regrets: in fact, without any of the indispensable inconveniences of life.

The Cynic said that in his opinion clothes made prigs, morals made prudes and regrets made pessimists.

The Greatest Living Novelist suggested that that was surely a little pornographic, but admitted that the meaning of the word "pornographic" was not quite clear to her. It had a pretty sound, however, and she often used it.

The Cynic said that he now believed, after reflection, that the saying, whether pornographic or not, should be transposed: it was his matured conviction that prigs were responsible for the clothes of the world, prudes for the morals of the world, and pessimists for the regrets of the world. Altogether, the world was in a very sad condition. The only hope of redemption lay in popularizing airships and guaranteeing frequent accidents, which would enable the passengers to get back to the land without delay.

The American Poet, tall and languid, differed. He presumed that the last flight of fancy was not intended to be taken seriously; but with regard to the rest — surely everything depended upon the point of view, upon the state of health and the number of hours devoted to sleep. He himself usually went to bed at eleven and rose at half past six. Then, when the dew was still glistening — it was wiser to wear rubbers — he could see the slow, ample beauty of the world unfolding itself in a dawn-lit panorama, while on the distant hills rested the glamour of high, perpetual stability. Yes, the world was all right if the flesh were properly cared for, and the devil kept in check.

The Poet Who Had Wandered sighed. How was it possible for a man of passionate responsiveness to keep in check that flood of memories — surely memory was the devil to an exile! — which could be drowned only in an ampler flood of wine? There, at once, was the temptation, and the triumph. Without wine, sin would lose much of its traditional savour. Yes. But sorrow would lose its antidote, memory its anæsthetic. There were storm-worn souls to whom Veuve Clicquot was a mere necessity of existence. Or whisky. Whisky was sordid, but strangely intoxicating.

The Critic, a nervous, self-centred little man, said jerkily that he did not agree with the American Poet in his view that the world was all right. The

world was undoubtedly censorious, scandal-loving, unjust, unforgiving, unappreciative, cold, hypocritical and mawkish.

The Humorist said he would draw a map of the world, with all the undesirable names left out. It would be a very blank map.

The Greatest Living Novelist believed that the heart of the people was in tune with the Infinite. She trusted the public, the public trusted her, and she would like another cup of tea.

Lady Normacott listened, content and quiescent. How much was intended as badinage, how much as serious self-revelation, she did not know. But she felt, vaguely, that she was encouraging literature.

Lady Winter had risen. With an almost imperceptible movement of the head, she invited Ward to join her. They strolled down one of the winding paths.

The Greatest Living Novelist watched them go. She had manufactured so much burning passion for her readers, that the real thing came to her as a breath of simplicity in an atmosphere of pretence. Involuntarily, she sighed. It was lonely to live only with the lovers she invented — those splendid Lancelots and Galahads who wooed to her piping and sinned or were sinless as her mood ordained. Sometimes, perhaps, she had admired her own creations, playing with imagination; had laughed a little, half

sadly, and longed a little, half mockingly, as she pictured the strong arms and throbbing hearts of heroes. But this dark-haired, silent man was real and personal. She liked him for the strength that he radiated; for the crimson-threaded lips that hinted a negation of strength. But chiefly he appealed to her because his face was cold and white, and only the eyes were fire-lit. With a soft light in her own eyes, she said that she would really like just one more cup of tea. It was always the extra cup that she longed for. She wished that every cup could be an extra cup.

The Poet Who Had Wandered brought it to her, and passed on to join the Critic.

"Have you noticed," he enquired, "that our friend Ward is losing his indifference to the only charming sex?"

The Critic shook his head. "Ward," he said, "has one of those egoistic, self-centred natures which always distress me. He is incapable of passion, as you can readily perceive from his pallid face and leucopathic manner. He is cold-blooded. His only interest in women is that of a scientist. He studies the feminine temperament analytically."

The Cynic had taken possession of Lord Daventry and was coruscating. But the old man did not notice him. He was wondering whether it was quite by accident that his grandson's visit had coincided with Lady Winter's.

CHAPTER III

"CLEVER men," Lady Winter said at last, "are usually very uninteresting."

Ward answered almost automatically. "It is only the uninteresting women who discover interesting men." He realized that the ordinary woman would have thrown her statement into the form of a question, as a concession to masculine crudeness.

She considered for a moment. "I must dispute that, in self-defence. But I think it is quite true that only uninteresting women contract the *habit* of discovering interesting men. It is a sign of superficiality. They demand novelty. Strangers appeal to them, for the moment. They admire everything that they know imperfectly. As soon as they think they really comprehend, they are tired. That is why so many women have a past. They are never content with the present — always looking to the future, to the new thing, the untested. They experiment perpetually — and sometimes the experiment is fatal."

"It is then that they become interesting," he said.

"You do not like the naïve woman?" she asked.

"I did not mean to imply that. I have noticed that women are usually most attractive when they know, and when they don't know, — quite frankly. When they think they know, and emphasize their sex by italicized hints about the subtlety and cleverness of women and the stupidity of men, they are rather tiresome — to men. After all, the greatest charm of a woman is her womanhood; and that is an affair of nature, not of art or artifice."

"But an uncut diamond is not brilliant," she suggested.

"Polished or unpolished, diamonds are valuable," he said. "It is the paste, the pretence, that one regrets. — I did not mean to use that word, by the way. One should never regret anything. It is a waste of time."

"Is that a habit of yours — to regret nothing? You are able to be consistent?"

"I try to be," he answered. "What is the good of regrets? They help nobody; do nothing. Discard, and pass on."

"Quite simple," she said, without smiling.

"It is merely a matter of practice," he returned. "More things are wrought by practice than this world dreams of — though it is dreaming rather systematically nowadays. Practice is only prayer energized, robbed of its sentimentality, — a standing-up prayer, instead of the grovelling borrowed

from old oriental despotisms — the etiquette of abjectness. The stupid servility of the conventional religions will have to go. The Churches have been preaching that God made man in His own image. Then science was supposed to have placed an insurmountable barrier between faith and reason by showing that the creation was not instantaneous, that there were intermediate stages. Of course, it did not erect any barrier at all, except between sense and nonsense. But it took some time for dogma to adapt itself to the new conditions, to recognize science as an ally instead of an enemy. Yet even now man is supposed to grovel before his divine likeness. Knee-worship is the worship of force, the propitiation of a possibly malignant spirit. In this age, it is almost amusing."

"And you — ?" she asked. "You never join in that — amusement?"

"*I* do not," he answered. "But several generations of ancestors that insist on living in this crowded tenement that is commonly supposed to be reserved for myself alone, occasionally attempt to revive their old customs. They were curious people, giving their God a portion of one-seventh of their time and rendering unto Cæsar or Satan a good deal more than was necessary. They sometimes offer specious excuses, — make me doubtful for the moment. It is so easy to be doubtful, and so useless. But I try to knock commonsense into them, and

into myself. If they won't die decently and permanently, they must be brought into line with modern views. It is silly to have a lot of ancestors with fixed weaknesses trying to repeat their mistakes at your expense. They must be disciplined. One can never be oneself; for one is always plural. But one can be the general of one's myriad selves. That is the nearest approach to individuality one can get out of the composite."

"Your approach seems to have had the right strength and direction," she said. "It has landed you on the green, — and pretty near the hole."

He took up the metaphor. "Yes, man goes through his life very much as he goes round the links: so many separate holes to be won or lost, and the complete game hanging in the balance; topping his drive, slicing, putting weakly; bunkers to avoid, and the water here and there; discouragements or happy chance, and the luck of the lie, but all to be averaged and overcome by a steady, consistent game. It 's nonsense to say there 's no luck in life, as we understand it. There is luck, good and bad. But it does n't make much difference to the game as a whole. The strong player comes out all right, the weak player tears up his card and lets his particular Bogey take the honours. But the feeling when one plays up to form — the drive full and true, to the furthest inch; on the green in two, straight and exact, and down with the long putt,

perfectly gauged. I like the phrase, a ' fair green.' One comes out of the rough on to the velvet. And not once only, as the culmination, but repeatedly, if one is fit to play the game at all."

"But in these days of the survival of the unfittest?" she suggested.

"The loser pays," he answered.

"There must be many losers," she said.

"Too many," he agreed.

"I have been specially interested in the survival-of-the-unfittest problem," she said. "You see, I am one of the survivors."

He walked by her side, without speaking. His pale face was absolutely calm. Yet he was obsessed by her physical nearness. Some influence flowed from her, passing into his body like a warm flood, charging his whole being electrically.

He turned after a few moments, and looked at her. The heat of the June day was oppressive; but unveiled, without a parasol, she seemed fearless of the sun-rays. The flush on her cheeks appeared to come from within, duskily, rather than to be external, superficial. Her eyes, drooping, slumbrous, absorbed fire without returning it. She was dressed entirely in white.

"One of the survivors," she repeated, as if mechanically, when he did not speak.

"Yes, I know," he said.

They had passed through the garden and the

ordered grounds and had come to the lake, dark and cool in the sunshine. Beyond, were the woods, with their massed green, their large restfulness, their veiled tragedy of teeming life and unremittent slaughter.

They sat down on one of the plain benches.

She spoke after some minutes. "You said you knew. Were you quite — sure?"

"Quite sure," he answered, simply.

He noticed that she shivered slightly. Then — "Do you remember," she asked, "sitting, some months ago, by a little pool and meditating for quite a long time? It was colder then, than now, and darker."

He realized that she was referring to the occasion of his encounter with Harrington, when the unhappy man had crept up from behind and threatened him so fantastically.

"I remember," he said. He wondered, as he had wondered at the time, how much of the scene she had witnessed, or comprehended, before she came through the gloom and spoke to her brother-in-law.

She answered his unspoken question. "You had a trying experience with James. I heard the whole of your conversation. Of course, I should not have listened, and, of course, I did. I admired your composure, Dr. Ward. It was my first lesson in what a man really means by self-possession, and I

was interested. I wonder if you knew how cold and merciless you seemed? "

"I did not intend to be merciless. I intended to be just, and forgot to be charitable, or even fair."

"I hope you don't regret what you did," she said. "A man who can be so quietly and brutally truthful when he believes that he is in imminent danger of a murderous attack, has no need to apologize. You were superb."

"I don't regret, of course," he answered. "I merely admit that I was wrong. But I learnt something, — and some day the lesson may be useful."

He comprehended that this chance encounter, with its dramatic conditions, had been the first and chief cause of her interest in him. She had seen him display courage; she had watched him acting as an inexorable judge when the majority of men would have been inclined, perhaps, to temporize and make the best of an awkward situation. It was his cold contempt for the man whom he had condemned and his disregard for any physical consequences, that had attracted her. His change of attitude at the end, his revelation of a religious fervour that in ordinary circumstances would merely have bored her, had intensified the appeal. She had regarded him, evidently, with curiosity.

His thoughts arranged themselves with complete certainty.

"By the way," he said, "this, I think, was really responsible for the peculiar meeting."

He took from his pocket the small gold pencil, with the initials E. W., that he had picked up.

"I saw it on the ground as I was riding by. If I had not dismounted to get it, I should not have lingered by the pool and so should not have met Harrington."

He passed it to her. "It is yours, I think?"

She took it. "Yes. I wondered where I had lost it. I used to sit on that old cracked bench sometimes and scribble a little. I suppose the pencil slipped out of my hand while I was dreaming. It is always easy to lose things."

"May I keep it?" he asked.

She gave it back to him.

He sat looking out at the lake. Gradually, the sunshine seemed to fade, the day passed into darkness. Mist drifted down upon them, heavy and clinging. Then lights were lit, one by one.

"You are very quiet," she said.

He came back at once from his dream. The sun was shining, the sky unclouded.

"You seemed so far away," she said.

"I was very near to you," he answered, and shivered slightly. She noticed it, as he had noticed her own involuntary movement before.

"What did you see?" she asked, putting her hand on his.

"Darkness. And then the lights were lit."

"And then?" she persisted.

"The lights went out," he said.

The pressure of her fingers seemed like wine of music in his blood.

CHAPTER IV

"I WANTED to ask you a question," she said.

"And now you have perplexed me, with your ideas about prayer and heredity. I do not know quite what you think."

"Nor do I," he said. "No one does. We have to find out, step by step, what we really think. It is a voyage of discovery, sometimes with a catastrophe at the end, — at the very end, perhaps, when almost home. A day more, and the port-lights will shine through the mist and the pilot's boat will put out. But we never see our pilot."

"Face to face," she said.

He nodded. "But what was the question?"

"It was about prayer, the soul, God. You spoke to James so earnestly, so surely. I thought you were that modern miracle — a Christian by conviction, not by inheritance or indifference."

"I will tell you what I believe," he said at last. "I believe in Christianity, I believe in prayer, the soul, God."

"Ah!" She seemed suddenly nearer to him, as if leaning on his strength.

"I have told you what I believe," he went on,

slowly. "Now I will tell you what I know. I know that Christianity is essentially true. I know that Christianity is essentially false. I know that man has a soul. I know that man has no soul. I know that God is. I know that God is not."

"You must explain," she said. "How do you reconcile such strange oppositions?"

"I don't reconcile them," he answered. "There is no opposition. It is a question of planes." He took her hand, and held it. "A lie is only a partial definition of the truth. There can be no negation without affirmation. To be, and not to be, are inseparable." He smiled. "Don't worry."

"I don't understand," she said.

"Read yourself," he answered. "You are the book of the wisdom of all the ages."

She protested, groping futilely. "But you don't help me!"

"I am your enemy," he said quietly. "Key and lock, hand and harp — the eternal antagonism."

"You leave me drifting on the sea," she said.

"I will pick you up," he answered, and took her in his arms.

CHAPTER V

"I FEEL like a child that has been alone in the dark," she said. "But now the lights are lit."

"They will go out again," he said.

"It does n't matter," she said. "I have seen them shining."

"My arms have been empty a long time," he said.

Yet it seemed to him at the moment that they had always held this smooth and supple body.

"It is like coming home," she said.

"Your room has been kept for you as you left it," he answered.

"I wish I could remember," she said.

"Why?" he asked. "Is it not enough to have been, and to be? It is not always wise to remember."

"I want to know," she said. "I have been trying to find out, all my life; wondering, groping, making experiments, failing. The lights would not shine."

"There was always the darkness," he said. "There was rest in the darkness."

"There is no rest in the darkness for those who have dreamed of light."

"Is it dreams that make the light?" he asked. "Or is there light without dreams?"

"Our eyes are different when we dream," she answered.

"For now we see as through a glass, darkly," he said. "But there, face to face."

"It is all strange to me," she said. "You are strange. I am strange to myself."

"We have not always been strangers," he said.

"But do you remember?" she asked. "Do you know? Or do you merely guess?"

"No one may guess the riddle of the universe," he answered. "But one may remember — dreams."

"And you recall them clearly?" she asked.

"When the sleeper wakens," he answered, "he remembers that he has dreamed. Yet the dreams may fade."

"Not all the dreams," she said. "Surely some remain vivid — for at least a little while."

"Yes," he answered. "And some remain vivid forever."

"You do not tell me much," she said.

"One does not tell such dreams," he answered. "One re-lives them. So, though they may have faded, they become clear again."

"And death?" she asked, leaning closely against him.

"There must be chapters in the book," he answered.

CHAPTER VI

SUDDENLY she changed.

"Are you always serious?" she asked, and laughed. He thought that her laugh was like the melody of silver bells; and laughed, himself, at the unoriginal image. Did lovers invariably think in platitudes and follow a worn groove?

"Why do you laugh?" she asked.

"Because *you* did," he answered, and went on, continuing his own train of thought. "But our silences are epigrams."

"Please don't be epigrammatic," she said. "I want to talk. But why did you think of silence? And why did you think of it as epigrammatic?"

"My dear," he said, "it was foolish to think at all. One should not waste golden moments in mere thinking."

"That is better," she said, contentedly. "I was afraid — just a little bit afraid — that you might n't be able to be flippant. I could n't be always in love with a man who was always serious. There is nothing so wearing as constant sincerity."

"When the heart is too full for ordinary earnestness," he rejoined, "I think the cooking of chickens

is the safest and most interesting topic. I once heard two lovers at a theatre filling in the intervals of 'Romeo and Juliet' with most satisfactory chickens. I have forgotten the details, and can remember only the delicate brown conclusion."

"'Romeo and Juliet'?" she asked.

"And perfectly cooked chickens."

"It was not right," she said.

"It was entirely appropriate," he affirmed; "the triumph of mind over matter, of intellect over atmosphere. In 'Romeo and Juliet' the lovers saw their future destiny. Between the acts, they took a brief vacation from destiny. Destiny is very irritating if one cannot escape from it."

"But *can* one escape from destiny — ever — even for moments?"

"One can escape," he said, "by pretending. There is a great deal in pretending. Sometimes I think pretence is more real than reality."

"It is more childlike," she said, and went on: "Children are so wonderful in their power of make-believe. It's only one form of the eternal creative spirit, I suppose. How beautiful it would be to become a child again, with just the urge and innocence of life —"

"And no knowledge?" he asked.

"One pays so much for knowledge," she answered.

"But is the price too high?" he asked.

"A little child," she said, not answering him;

"little hands in the darkness — and a little nearer to God in His Heaven — "

"You remember Lewis Carroll?" he asked, looking at the water.

> "'While little hands make vain pretence
> Our wanderings to guide.'"

"And you remember Rudyard Kipling?" she rejoined. "'If this be vanity, if this be vanity —'"

"Vanity let it be," he agreed. "I don't mind. I am perfectly docile."

"I was n't thinking," she said, as if he had accused her, "of the ordinary maternal instinct, with which so many women are unjustly credited. That may be useful, or banal, or beautiful, as you look at it. But there 's something selfish, essentially, in the perpetual 'my'; 'my baby,' 'my son,' 'my daughter.' Why should a mother love her child, just because it is hers? Why cannot she love all childhood — what a child stands for? Most people think there is something specially beautiful in the undiscriminating, unreasoning love of a mother for her own children. There is n't anything particularly beautiful, unless the children are the incarnation of dreams, ideals: unless they mean the consummation of great love; the fruition of strange, shy, passionate desires."

"Nature is considered beautiful," he said. "But nature is really clumsy, uneducated. She is always

thinking of to-morrow, forgetting that to-morrow inevitably becomes to-day, and therefore, from nature's point of view, negligible."

"To-day!" she said; and then: "Oh, the strange, inevitable, horrible transitoriness of life; the perpetual going on, with no respite for rest; so many days in a human life — an exact number, ticked off remorselessly; gone forever. And how we waste them — looking forward or back to the one day — forgetting the everlasting Now!"

"It is good to go on," he said. "Change and decay — it is beautiful. Would you change change? Imagine a world of petrified IS. No WAS: no TO BE: just IS."

"But if one were happy?" she said. "A child — forever — "

"In the nursery?" he asked.

"Life was so simple and clear," she said.

"Don't you remember the tragedies?" he asked; "the broken dolls; misunderstanding, injustice, unhappiness; little hands beating on a locked door — "

"That was because of the grown-up world," she said. "Yes, I remember the locked door — the door that would not open, so that one might see and be seen — "

"Is it not the same now?" he asked. "We are the children still, and we beat upon the locked door that shuts out from us the great grown-up world —

angels and archangels and all the glorious company of Heaven — devils and vampires and the futile ghosts of the night — call them by whatever names you will. And we cannot find the key to the door."

"Will it never be opened?" she asked.

He laughed. "Dear, it is not really closed. But it is heavy, and the hinges and the catch are rusty. That is the tragedy of all childhood. The 'locked' door could be swung open — but the hands are too feeble — and so they beat upon the panels, but cannot turn the knob."

She put her arms round his neck and drew him down to her. "Dear," she said, "some time, will you open the door for me and let me see what lies beyond?"

"Would you like to see?" he asked. "You would not be afraid?"

"I am only afraid of the darkness," she answered.

"But suppose there is darkness beyond the door?" he asked.

"It would be no worse than now," she answered. "No worse than the darkness we know."

"You cannot be sure," he said.

"Is there no light to lighten the darkness?" she asked.

"There is the light that lighteth the world," he said. "And that light is everywhere, if we would see it: here, as there."

"Then there is no door really?" she asked.

"The door is only a metaphor," he answered. "They that have eyes to see, can see. And the blind are blind."

"Always?" she asked.

"The blind may be taught to see," he answered. "And there are others who, having eyes, see not."

"The light of the world," she murmured.

He drew himself away from her. "The sun is setting," he said. "Look."

She looked at the blood-gold west: at the cloud-fleece, dripping crimson.

"Is it so late?" she said. "I did not know. We have been here a long time."

"We shall be late for dinner," he said, and laughed. "Even Romeo and Juliet must dine. You see how appropriate the chickens were."

"You are a curious man," she said, gravely. "I can hardly believe that all this — has happened."

"It happened long ago," he said, and his lips closed tightly. "Come — before it is dark again."

"You give me such a strange sense of eerieness," she said.

"Give me your lips," he said, bending down to her upturned face. Passion leapt suddenly from him like a flame, and she shivered in his arms; then clung to him for a few moments, tense, unrelaxed.

CHAPTER VII

WARD did not attempt to control his thoughts during the evening, except in so far as deliberate drifting may be called control. He realized the strangeness and danger of his mood, but a chemical change seemed to have taken place in the constitution of his whole being: the electricity of passion had disturbed and re-energized the molecular system. Except for occasional intervals, when a rift appeared in the mists of emotion and he emerged for a little while into clear self-knowledge, he did not review the events of the afternoon connectedly, or attempt to analyze his conduct. What had happened, had happened — not in the few hours of a summer's day, unpremeditated and unprepared, but as the inevitable sequel to a tale twice told. Glimpses of revelation came to him, but provocatively, leaving him still unsure whether deeds of the past or the future, or his own imaginings of the present, were flashed imperfectly on the film of consciousness. But life was no longer restricted, ordered and confined; to be lived decorously or futilely in the space of a generation. Time seemed to have passed from the

limits of normal reckoning: he was scarcely conscious of the long series of divisions, of the shadows on the dial, the separation of light from darkness. Somewhere on the circumference of the unbroken circle he had come again to the eternal WOMAN. His whole being flowed out to her: habit, personality, will, were fluid in that fervent heat of passion. Her eyes, that he had seen no longer slumbrous; her caressing voice; her blood-warm lips, her smooth and supple body; were woven into his fermenting brain, warp and woof of dreams dyed with desire. So long the vanities of pleasure had been blotted by sleep, or revived, disowned, and clutched again through hours of restlessness. Surely now he might take his ease, forgetting the task and the taskmaster, drinking the ancient wine, following the ancient lure!

Yet, driven as he was by the impulses of fever, his manner, through long habit, was so restrained, and the pallor of his face, crowned with its contrasting jet-black hair, so secretive of emotion, that even the Greatest Living Novelist did not realize the storm within. Lord Daventry alone had coded the signals of the hot, unresting eyes, always, before, so steadfast and serene: and the old man did not waste the opportunity for a mocking gibe.

"So our Samson, so strong in his purity, has found at last the beguiling Delilah? Eh? No longer is John numbered with the saints: his place is with the sinners — and particularly with the

pretty sinners. Did not Antony fling away the world for a few embraces? And a greater than Cleopatra is here. Our modern Roman changes the letter, but preserves the spirit, of that sublime renunciation: not for the world would he fling away an embrace. This is eminently a Christian attitude. Love one another. Good-night."

Ward went on to his room, slowly. It was some time before he undressed. Then, in his white sleeping suit, he stood by the open window, watching the clear light of the full moon, which revealed no lure of intoxication. Something of the paganry that dwells in men responded to that serene glamour. It was Diana herself, chaste and unpassionate, who diffused her cold and indifferent beauty through cold and indifferent space: that mortality might see, and seeing, worship, the superb supremacy of the divine. In a moment, reason rejected this separation of the ruled from the regal, of the evanescent from the eternal. Man is but a mood of his Maker; the creature of a day symbolizes the eternal Creator. If passion be human, it is also of God: the love that carries a man utterly beyond himself, lifting him to a plane unscalable without those wings of phantasy, is assuredly but one of the letters in the divine alphabet, upon which is based the language of the immortals.

He turned away. His whole being throbbed with a sense of requirement, of an urgent need. Merely

to rest, to be placid and still, was impossible. He was aware of a continued, imperious call, as from a summer sun to an immured prisoner. He must strain toward the light —

The spiritual wanderlust which he had governed harshly and kept in check, asserted its compelling authority. He must go out from his narrow world of self-restraint and ordered limits, into the large world of romance and dreams. After all, life was very brief, at the best, and little in its scope and possibilities: sordid for so many, pleasant only for those children or masters of chance who lived without scruples, but not without love, wresting from each day the maximum of indulgence. Surely they were wise in their generation and hour, plucking with both hands the fruits which to the undaring became tortures of Tantalus! And the dead — well, who knew? There was much babble, but little logic. All the creeds and all the dreams of the world were founded on that demand for faith which means merely the suppression of judicial discerning enquiry. Could a reasonable belief be based on the negation of reason? So far as knowledge went, each human being ended with the final heartbeat, and was very silent in the grave. Where was the soul, the boasted reality of a man, during the oblivion of profound slumber? How could that spirit, whose heritage was to range the uttermost bounds of the universe, be chained to an inert body,

which could destroy all apparent consciousness in its mimicry of death? He had sometimes operated in an almost hopeless case, and seen, when fears were confirmed, the approach of dissolution. It was strange that that last, almost indistinguishable flutter should release the soul from the utter blankness of the anæsthetic, and endow it with instant recognition. Very wise the soul must be, to know the precise fraction of time when it must cease to merge itself in the disintegrating structure which for minutes or for hours had been impotent and unresponsive. Perhaps the failure of the heart was not the necessary signal: the spirit might linger, dutiful and unrecorded, till the last brain-cell was atrophied, the last particle of tissue shrivelled, the last corpuscle, sad and lonely, sacrificed to fate. He laughed. Yes, death, with its promised magnificence, was a dubious reward for the self-denial and thwarted instincts of a lonely life. Better to grasp what was tangible, to hold gladly the only delights that consciousness might know, than to wait austerely for a development which ended, perhaps, with the subterranean empire of the crawling, unwitting worm. Eat, drink and be merry: for to-morrow, man dies. Eat forbidden fruits, drink the wine of passion, be merry with the gladness and abandonment of sin. For what was sin, but the natural indulgence proscribed by those harsh and gloomy ones whose aborted instincts could not comprehend

the joy of a full, free life? Better to adventure in that happier world of light, than to linger imprisoned in the darkness, useless, unthanked and unrewarded. Life was very short: it were wiser to make the most of it, and trust scantly in the delusiveness of death.

For a moment, the mist lifted. How could he reconcile his own strange experiences, his actual knowledge, with these idle suggestions? Verily, the worm had his moment of outward triumph, and the earth took again her wayward children, dust to dust and ashes to ashes. The ritual must be observed; there must be a conclusion for each chapter of the book, and the turning to a new page: but when should the final FINIS be written?

The attempt to think connectedly irked him. Deliberately, he yielded again to the mood of madness. The checked cravings of many days and nights, scattered impressions of broken reveries, were gathered together and woven into an orgy of sensuous imaginings. He threw himself on his bed and, with his eyes closed, abandoned himself to the allurement of waking dreams. Images, vivid and real, passed or lingered. Faces, changing yet the same, came very close to him: smiling, provocative, or wondering, unsure. Crimson lips repeated the challenge of questioning glances . . . The soft curve of the mouth was like a child's, but there was knowledge in the mocking violet eyes —

A faint flush tinged his cheeks. He stretched out his arms. His lips moved to the crimson curve, his eyes returned the wilful temptation of those which burnt their challenge into the rioting brain —

He sat up, suddenly, tortured by this vivid imagery. Slipping from the bed, he went again to the window.

The cold, clear light of the moon neither bewildered nor assisted him. He had passed too far beyond the border line of reason and unreason: the thrall of passion held him; freedom would have seemed intolerable. Not the voice and the magic of one summer only wrought alchemy in blood and nerves and soft grey matter of the brain: the voices of many summers, heard but shunned in their proper order, now forced their way imperiously to an audience.

He knew that this was not a mere abrupt invasion: it was the sequel to those moments when he had half yielded in thought to the allurement of sex and beauty — not the beauty of a known individual, but of one yet unmet, built up vaguely by hints from the actual. The faces which had so often fluttered to him before sleep; his habit of noticing any special charm in those whom he met constantly or rarely; his perception of the redeeming feature even in ugliness — the single perfect curve, the moulding of a lip, the transformation of a smile — all, he realized, pointed to one persisting tendency

of character. Sensuousness was in him: rooted in his nature, it had grown with his growth, establishing itself impregnably.

The sheen of silver light flickered in the air. The glamour and witchery of the moon had come to their full power. Twenty centuries fell from him. Pagan again, he watched Aphrodite rising from the sea; bowed down to her and worshipped, with the lurking smile of the sceptic for divinity, but the ardour of the lover for incarnate loveliness. He saw again Greek groves and Syrian shrines: girls danced, or waited with lit eyes for one who should come in Ishtar's name. He caught the gleam of argent limbs; visualized the curves —

His grandfather, gibing, had mentioned Antony. Yes, Antony, master of half the world, had flung away that empire for the slavery of passion. Well, he would fling away a wider lordship. He had been master of himself. He surrendered that sovereignty.

Surely the woman whom he desired inherited the magic of the superb Egyptian! Her very body, with its lithe loveliness; the fashioning of the beautiful face; the luring, fathomless eyes, the clear voice, with its caress, its hint of coldness, — all were part of his conception of the queen of kings of kings.

The colours of the Orient were in her name — gold, and turquoise, and pearl. He imaged her, diademed and robed, with jewels blazing round the

whiteness of her throat. Then, denuding her in fancy of crown and royal vesture, of jewels and impersonal magnificence, he saw her as she was: beauty, desire, glamour, — woman. He stretched out his arms: if only she could come to him —

He wandered to and fro, feverishly. The intensity of his desire appalled him. His whole nature, fermenting, seemed to expand to its supreme limits, and project itself, calling for her, claiming her, with a force savage and irresistible. Shaken by this violence, perplexed and unstrung, he fell on his knees by the bedside, covering his face. It was thus that he had been taught, in his childhood, to approach God; it was thus that he had tried, in his manhood, to approach the child. Something of the quietude associated even with automatic habits that once had a spiritual significance, came to him now. And suddenly, in that momentary stillness, the inexplicable prevision with which he was familiar, the awareness of an approaching event, struck him like a wave of cold light. He raised his head. Still kneeling, in the attitude, though not the act, of prayer, he watched, with dilated eyes, the closed door, which seemed to quiver in the flickering moonbeams.

CHAPTER VIII

MATTER, the puzzle of the ages, is still an enigma; and to the Sage, who is aware of his great ignorance and of the wonderful complexity of life's most familiar details, spirit also remains uncharted, undiscovered. He has heard rumours with regard to it; fables and fairy tales, often prettily attractive, sometimes astonishing. But while many explorers are searching for an island in some Pacific Ocean of smooth hours, an island of rest, perhaps, and unfretted ease, the Sage meditates upon the chance of a continent at the poles of time — vast, mysterious; swept by winter storms, sunlit through summers; barriered, but not impenetrable.

Man is still young, but little by little, line by line, he has added to his strength and equipment, and the gain of centuries is duplicated with ease in single years. Soon, he will recognize the miracle in each mole-hill, the simplicity of each mountain. He will outgrow the necessity for noise, and will talk with thoughts, tossed from brain to brain. Uncircumscribed, he will traverse the future as freely as the past. Prophecy will become intelligent

observation. There will be no bewilderment, no surprises. In the atmosphere of knowledge, he will learn to live serenely. And passion will die.

Ward rose at last to his feet. The pallor of his face had gone; the faint tinge had deepened till a dull glow suffused the cheeks. The certainty that was in him swept through the veins like fire. Every particle of his body tingled with intense vitality; the sense of supreme power thrilled through him. The drabness of ordered, conventional routine was fused in the white heat of passion; feeling, that usually smouldered and flickered, had flamed into incandescence. Even to touch her hands, to feel the fire pass from him into that smooth, velvet flesh — the thought was like wine to him. His eyes shone. Sensibility seemed to have reached its highest point. Through all the years of strength and self-control, this perfection of energy had been unrealized, unimagined.

The changed details of the room suddenly stamped themselves upon consciousness. In the days when it had been his own, he had kept it unlittered and scantily furnished: confusion in environment, as in thought and habit, was repugnant to him; and he had carried simplicity to the point of severity. There had been a bed, a writing-table, two chairs, and a wardrobe: a few books were in a rack on the table. A Kabistan rug, and two or three prints

on the panelled walls, completed the equipment. Yet the place had been charged with his personality. The bareness, the contemptuous indifference to comfort revealed in the hard, uncushioned chairs, the absence of knick-knacks, bric-à-brac and colours, seemed harshly masculine. But now, though the room had been rearranged for his occupation, there were evidences of another and less austere influence. A cushioned couch had been added, and a dressing-table; the small bed had been replaced by a large one; the floor had been carpeted; and instead of the plain chairs there were others, daintily upholstered and quaintly designed. A Japanese screen was in one corner, and a cheval mirror stood obliquely by the door communicating with the next room. It was so placed that it reflected the other door, opening on to the landing.

The femininity of the place, contrasted with the starkness that he had impressed upon it in other days, seemed strange to him. Curiously, in spite of his surrender to passion, it irked him. While an indescribable tenderness flowed from him toward the woman whom he desired, he was impatient of effeminate surroundings. He looked at the mirror, half curiously, half resentfully. It was before such things that idle women spent so many hours. And yet, why not? If a woman were beautiful, surely she should share the pleasure that she gave? If she were not beautiful, it was her mere duty to make

herself as attractive as possible. Slovenliness in appearance, as in speech or manner, was a crime against the sex which preserved in a decadent age some ideal of loveliness. Yet a greater offence was the slovenliness of emotion that characterized so many women, shallow, and unaware of their shallowness; living on the surface of life, and whether content or querulous, not realizing the depths that should be sounded, the wonderful possibilities of their own natures, glimpsed only intuitively when the unconscious self pressed forward, and surrendered without effort. But when to the charm of the body was added the appeal of a subtle, comprehending mind; when the music of a low voice and the unveiled desire of violet eyes completed the allurement of a perfectly moulded form — then man, egoistic and still savage, yet raised in a dream to the stature of the gods, fulfilled himself in passion, calling one woman goddess, even while they sinned together. For this is the tradition of the race. So, in the beginning of myths, Aphrodite, first of women to discard mere functioning, first to reveal the magic of soft lips and clinging arms, was rewarded with an immortal crown and a divine throne. In the same spirit of appreciation, modern man makes his offerings of coronets, tiaras and automobiles to the Venus who rises from the swaying waves of the ballet — those rhythmic billows, lucent with legs, crested with foam of snowy lingerie.

"Dear God," he said, aloud, "fragments and follies — beauty and the beast — so the mind wanders!"

He was silent for a little while, not deliberately, but drifting with the tide of emotions. Above, the blue sky seemed to open, cloudless, quivering with light. Half-hypnotized, unaware of reality, he gazed into the mirror, as into a limitless sea from which loveliness should emerge. And as he looked, shaken by desire, and with will and instinct joining in an insistent, irresistible demand, he saw the reflected door move slowly toward him. And so she came to him, in the glass, at first darkly.

CHAPTER IX

LORD DAVENTRY, in his room at the end of the corridor, was restless. Philpotts had prepared him for the ordeal of sleep, and had retired silently; but the old man sat in his easy chair, his arms folded, his head bent down.

"When we are young," he reflected, "we waste one-third of our time in bed — when we should be living. And the Golden Age passes, and we waste two-thirds of our time in trying to live, when desire is dead and oblivion is the only appropriate refuge. But sleep eludes us."

Sombrely, he watched the parade of ghosts passing and repassing: dead friends, women and men; dead loves and hatreds; pleasures, follies, successes, failures: the good and evil of life, reduced to the lowest common denominator — irrevocability.

"But the young have also their ghosts," he said, addressing a shape that looked at him questioningly. "Yes, dear self, so brave with youth, you peered sometimes into the future, and you saw — This. For us, the old, the superfluous laggards on the stage, there remains only the past. You are our ghosts, as we were yours."

He raised his head after a little while and looked

at the moonlight streaming through the white curtains. He regarded it at first quietly, inscrutably: then his lips twitched.

"True," he said. "Very true. The perpetual philosopher. Moonshine — and the night." He nodded to the ghosts. "We had a devilish good time," he said. "And what we have had, we have." He laughed — a thin, cracked laugh. "One cannot hold moonshine — but it comes from the heavens."

The parade had passed on. Now, in the moonlight, faces and forms seemed pallid and pain-weary. The old man watched them, nodding from time to time as a familiar figure evoked special memories. His own face seemed furrowed and sunken, and his eyes lustreless.

"On the third day he descended into hell," he murmured. "Even the sons of God must pay the penalty. And we, the sons of women and men — how can we escape?"

A girl's eyes challenged him. In the distorting glitter, she was still beautiful; but wilful, provocative. He watched her, impersonally.

"My dear," he said, "what is the good? You are quite dead. We played the universal game — and you lost. But you know perfectly well that I did n't win. Why give yourself the trouble of a futile resurrection? After all, you had your moments, child, as well as I. Why do you worry me?"

He stood up, with a gesture of dismissal. "I refuse to be worried. I have grown old. Is n't that enough? Bloodless, passionless, useless. Go and haunt the young, to whom life is still an illusion, love a mystery, woman an enigma, and sleep a peaceful refreshment. The young, who have yet to grow old; to pass the milestones — and come to the millstones." He checked himself. "From soliloquy to senility," he sneered. "Moonshine for limelight, ghosts for audience, — and the curtain waiting."

His ears, preternaturally acute, caught some faint sound. He turned, listening intently; then moved toward the door, opened it, and looked down the corridor. Slowly, he relaxed: a faint smile flickered over his lips, leaving his eyes cold and metallic.

"I thought my old instinct had not deceived me," he murmured. "Surely I should be familiar with the turning of keys — at midnight." He began to walk down the corridor, slowly. The third door was closing as he came to it. He caught a glimpse of a white arm, of a clinging gown, lace-edged. He went on until he came to his grandson's room. He listened for a little while, and then came back. Thoughtlessly, he left the door of his room open, and with the light full on, sat in his chair, facing the corridor. So, a strange sentinel — like a caricature of his daily Philpotted self — he watched for two hours, muttering from time to time, gibing, sneering, until he fell asleep.

CHAPTER X

GAZING into the mirror, Ward saw the door swing back noiselessly when she released it. He noticed that her eyelids drooped, that her face had the remoteness of sleep. Her feet, unslippered, bare, arrested his glance: they seemed so little, so fragile —

She took a few steps; then stopped, as if in doubt. Slowly, she stretched out her arms, with a vague, questing movement, that seemed to hold both invitation and entreaty. As she stood thus, beautiful but pallid in the silver light, Ward turned from the mirror and gazed at her directly. For the first time he realized that she wore only her sleeping robe, a film of diaphanous lace and soft whiteness —

He did not move, for a sense of unreality was creeping over him. It seemed that what was happening was a reflex of the past, or a foreshadowing of the future. The present was formless, negligible. Hours were minutes; minutes hours. He could keep no reckoning. His eyes became dim as he looked at her, shadowed as by a curtain, and at last he turned again to the mirror, as if her reflection must linger there.

He found himself in a strange room, yet he did not remember moving. She was asleep. He bent down, that her breath might come to him as a caress. It seemed very wonderful that she was there, sleeping in his room — as a wife might sleep. His thoughts ran on, automatically. Her body was very beautiful. Strange that such magic should lie in supple whiteness, that curves and soft mouldings should hold an appeal so imperious that it became painful. In all passion, however carnal and degraded, lurked some distillation of the ideal, some faint perfume of poetry: and with this distillation, this perfume, sadness lingered, inseparable from the joy. And as passion became less savage and more sensuous, the pain increased with the fineness of the pleasure. Many a poet had drowned his inspiration in wine, that he might no longer rack his heart with the sorrow of splendid dreams.

The scene allured and saddened him. It was to such visions that multitudes of men came night by night — men, perhaps, indifferent and cold, satiated with beauty that had become too familiar, with caresses that no longer inflamed, with surrender that had lost its magic and drifted into the colourlessness of a function. The average husband was very banal and incompetent; yet, as a rule, the wife was not free from fault. For though a man may forget, in the careless revelations of marriage, the courtesy and graciousness of sweetheart days, it is

too often because the woman has forfeited her right to be idealized. Limited and imperfect, she has allowed herself to be known, and when she is known, she ceases at once to attract. Man always clothes with his dreams the woman whom he thinks he loves. As soon as he is disillusioned and flung back into the drabness of reality, love dies and the siren of his imagining becomes an incubus, to be endured and resented. A wife should never allow herself to be known: always there should be something in her femininity that refuses to be analyzed, some power of purity or passion, of supreme subtlety or supreme simplicity, that continues vital and enthralling.

A wife! The word which he had repeated in his thoughts now struck a sudden chord of unrest. The association was incongruous. This overwhelming, flaming madness was remote from wifehood, with its joyous but sane love, its serene intimacy, its adjustment to the daily, normal details of life, and the larger purposes of the race and the species: Marriage, conceived, perhaps, in a mood, is completed in a mould. The wisdom of the world, no less than the sorrow of the world, is inwoven with that enduring convention. But passion cannot be caged. Column of smoke, or pillar of fire, it lures on the Chosen People — the mad, the strong, the lovers of love — till they come at last to the Promised Land — and find their living waters in the sullen Dead Sea.

It was a woman, not a wife, whom he had coveted and still craved — a woman with red lips whose sweetness should be crushed with kisses — And she had come to him, dreaming, and drawn by his need for her, by his savage, irresistible appeal. Why should he not take this gift that the night, and the power of the night, had brought to him? Life was such a little thing, time so slight, yet sinister in its ceaseless, inexorable retreat. To-morrow was for fools, serfs of creeds, cowards shunning in panic the gifts that destiny can offer only once. Now was for those who would live indeed before death gripped them and they passed into the darkness.

All the tendencies that were in him — the souls of the dead through whom he lived — ranged themselves as in hostile armies, the savage and sensuous, the serene and spiritual. Tentacles, tipped with flame, plucked at his heartstrings, searing them.

And suddenly, reflection passed from him. He no longer reached out from his cage of emotions, clutching at vague thoughts, reminiscences of old habits. The room was darkened, and he stayed in the darkness. Yet, projected from some storehouse of subconsciousness, moving pictures floated before his eyes; pictures at first strange and unfamiliar, yet soon recognized and placed in their order of succession. He stood, rigid, watching, as the panorama passed. And at last there were no more pictures. He was buried in intense darkness,

through which came only a sound of breathing. He listened, until the rhythm seemed intolerable. He began to move forward, stealthily, with clenched hands.

He did not know how long it was before the darkness lifted. He was trembling excessively. Averting his eyes from the bed, he listened for the sound of a woman breathing. He could hear nothing.

And so, interminably, he waited, with the terrible feeling of one who is lost in a jungle of centuries, through which no clear path is discoverable. And the spirit of the jungle haunted him, threateningly, mockingly. He dreamed of monstrous violence, of irrevocable deeds hidden in the darkness beyond the light, waiting for the light to spread and discover them to the knowledge of men.

CHAPTER XI

IN the early hours of a clear summer morning, the night, with its illusions, its melancholy, or its brief exaltation, seems remote from experience, a phantasma dissolved in its own unreality. The freshness of the air, the soft warmth of the sun, have the glamour of things that are young. The day is still virginal. Faith is no longer incredible, nor happiness a mere dream.

At six o'clock Ward awoke, with a feeling of urgence, of necessity. He was confused for some time; the vraisemblance of dreams still lingered; as he opened his eyes, he expected to see a face that had haunted him through his brief sleep, alluring, wondering, accusing. As in the aftermath of a debauch, when the brain is sluggish and unsure, and details have not emerged from the complex of disorder, he groped for a clear understanding. Slowly the picture came back: the face with closed eyes; tranquil, unfearing; yet condemning, haunting, demanding reasons. He heard the measured breathing: then, reverberating, insistent, the silence struck him like a tumult of sound. Painfully, he pieced together the fragments that memory sur-

rendered with reluctance. Yet, when he had finished, when the happenings of the night had been reconstructed, he did not comprehend. He thrust out his hand as if to ward off the shadow that threatened to overwhelm him. Surely this was but the distress of nightmare, the heaviness of a dream not yet recognized as unreal, incoherent!

But the oppression lingered. He could not reconcile returning commonsense with these vivid illusions: he could not separate the earlier impressions from the later imaginings, or say when the actual ended and fallacy began. He remembered the growing tempest of passion, the insurgence of his whole nature in that moon-flooded night; he remembered the unrest, the waiting, then the clear prevision. But that which he had seen through the mirror and done in the shadows of time — was it less real than the unreality of the moonlight, a phantasmagoria of the emotion-drugged senses, baseless and futile?

A cold bath brightened him. He dressed, and went out into the garden. Gradually, habit resumed its control. Events and imaginations took their proper place in the ordered scheme of thought. The revival of the past, the augury of the future, seemed less ominous. The peculiar peacefulness of the early hour, the sense of freshness and new life, made even destiny less harsh and not wholly irrevocable.

He retraced his steps.

Lord Daventry, sauntering down the same path, regarded him with curious eyes.

"I perceive that you are thinking," he said. "It is a useful occupation, which I frequently commend to the young, as possessing all the charms of the unfamiliar. But your saintship is up early. Is this a libel on our beds, or a delicate compliment to our sparkling air and sunshine — truly so different from the reproachful atmosphere of your own dear Arcadia? Eh?"

"There is certainly a shade of difference," his grandson admitted.

"Yes; a sunshade," the old man rejoined, drily. "When I recall that colossal canopy of smoke, that perpetual fog of dust and ochreous vapour, I have a feeling precisely similar to the one which distresses me when I think of your delightful brother — " He paused and shrugged his shoulders — "George. There is the same quality of opaqueness, and the same prospect that it will be everlasting." He checked himself, and was silent for a moment. "I did not tell you," he resumed, "that I have very good reason to expect very bad news. This exemplary — " He paused again, and shrugged his shoulders, for the quaint conjunction had become automatic with him — "George, I am told, has now fallen in love, for the fourth and final time, with the chorus girl of our melancholy anticipations.

She is no doubt far too good for him, but I cannot regard her with enthusiasm as the future Lady Daventry. Yet the entanglement seems likely to proceed to that fatal extremity. Pleasant, eh?"

"I am sorry," Ward said. He understood his grandfather too well to suggest that the news might be false, or, if true, that George's momentary intentions might not prove permanent. He knew that the old man had measured the precise value of his information.

"Of course," Lord Daventry continued, "we are a strange family. It is scarcely fair to judge us by normal standards, for we are not normal people. But though we have been passionate and romantic, moody and misanthropic, austere and cynical, we have never yet produced such a specimen as — I will refrain from naming him. We have done a few wise things and innumerable wicked things, and some of us, I believe, have done some rather remarkable things — you know that legend of queer happenings once or twice in the centuries — magic or deviltry, second-sight or clairvoyance: call it what you will — "

Ward nodded.

"It is quite possible," the old man said, "that we have gone as far as chorus girls, or their earlier equivalents. It is even probable." His expression was curiously benignant. "But we have never gone further. We have avoided asking them

to return the visit. It has been reserved for the freak of the family to issue that invitation. Fortunately, the girl cannot accept the proposal without also accepting the proposer. That will at least cause her to hesitate. Eh?" He took his grandson's arm. "But one can never trust women. The best of them are bad — for young men. Now even you, my dear John, have been scorching your saintly soul in the alluring flame of femininity. It is amusing, of course, but dangerous."

Ward withdrew his arm. "I thought we knew each other well enough," he said coldly, "to refrain from irritating interference. In any event, you know that I have always gone, and shall' always go, my own way — as you have gone yours."

"I trust not," Lord Daventry said. "Go your own way, if you must — but not as I have gone mine. My path was a trifle irregular, and irregularities, my dear John, are expensive."

He was silent for a little while, reviewing a procession of ghosts. Their faces seemed less pallid, less accusing, in that sunlit hour.

"Have I ever mentioned to you," he said at last, "that during my wanderings in America, I met one of the millionaires for which that great country is justly celebrated? He had been a gold-miner, I believe, and a speculator. Amongst other things, he had speculated in matrimony, — and lost heavily. Yet his wife was a very charming woman; un-

usually attractive, and also unusual in other ways. As I understood the story, there were faults on both sides, but no open scandal: that is to say, everybody knew about it, but it was a profound secret. There was no divorce. The lady, though lax, was a Catholic. — By the way, Lady Winter, I believe, is a Catholic? "

"I don't see the point," Ward said. "Of course, I know there is one, or you would not have revived the story."

"A coincidence, rather than a point," the old man rejoined, suavely. "You see, I happened to meet the lady again in England, and I was naturally interested. She has resumed the name of her first husband, and is regarded as a widow. Odd that I should meet her, eh? — especially as I am perhaps the only man in the country who is aware of the precise circumstances. Of course, every woman is entitled to her own past, and I should not dream of referring to a purely private matter unless there were excellent reasons. I am not by inclination a preacher. I advance no claims to saintliness. It is not my business to improve the morals of the world, to safeguard the innocent, or be shocked by the too sophisticated. Let the bishops earn their salaries. I am merely a connoisseur of emotion. I have played a somewhat active rôle in my time: now, old and outmoded, in spite of Philpotts, I prefer to look on, to criticise, to be

cynical — but not to interfere. Nevertheless, it is permissible to offer a suggestion — if one does not make a habit of being so foolish. Eh?" He looked thoughtfully at his grandson. "I should n't — go too far with Lady Winter, if I were you," he said. "Her husband might object — even if he had to come from America to do so."

He patted Ward's arm gently. "Our modern Saint John has also his revelation," he murmured.

CHAPTER XII

THE Poet Who Had Wandered was explaining Love, the inexplicable.

"Once," he said, "I was rambling in a country of scattered farms and villages. It was in the early autumn, and nature was wearing those wonderful tints in which the splendour of the summer, and the desolation of the winter, are symbolled so hauntingly. At the end of a long day, I came to the crest of a hill and looked down into a little valley, with a solitary cottage in the midst of it. It was so peaceful. And I went down, leaving behind me the great, strange world, with its dead sun, and came to the cottage, to rest, and find shelter, and be at ease. And I thought of Love, in one of its aspects — the Love which beckons a man when he is weary and sad-hearted, and calls him to quietude and solace, though it be in a little cottage in a far-away valley of life, and he must leave behind him — yet so gladly — the large visions of the world, and descend from the hill that he had climbed."

The Cynic asked, whether rambling produced such serious, delightful thoughts, or whether the

thoughts themselves induce the habit of rambling.

The Poet did not answer. The sun shone on his brown-grey hair, and his face, noble in its outlines, lost the petulant expression that too often disfigured it. He seemed younger, more sincere, less hardened by the disappointments and rebuffs which his temperament had made inevitable.

"There is another aspect," he said. "Of course, there are very numerous aspects: Love is a jewel with many facets. But at this moment I am thinking especially of one. I have spoken of the quiet, serene affection which appeals to a man who has passed through some degree of tribulation and disillusionment. But consider the ardent flame of the young, who have not proved with growing weariness and bitterness of heart the vanity of all enthusiasm, and reverence, and high hopes. Somewhere in the twilight, eyes challenge eyes and hot lips meet. Time, fleeting and sombre, is transfigured. In the immensity of faith, the sordid and commonplace lives that litter the world are dwarfed and disregarded. Clear signs they are, of wrecked ideals and abandoned dreams. But the new disciples will learn only from their own experience. And in ten years, perhaps, in the place of the happy, soft-eyed girl, there is another dowdy woman, with her babies, her washing, mending, cleaning and cooking, if she be poor; or her empty

idleness and empty heart, if she be rich. And there is another disappointed, disagreeable man, who goes forth drearily to his labour or to his club, and returns disconsolately to his home. But why this sad transformation? Is Love, then, such a little thing, and so ephemeral?"

The Humorist said he did n't think so. The emotion itself, he had noticed, possessed remarkable vitality: to use the simple, unaffected language of modern criticism, it was tough, very tough. But it required variety. As soon as it had exhausted the possibilities of one beloved object, it passed on gently but firmly to another object, equally beloved. He might quote the words of an immortal writer whose venerated name he had unfortunately forgotten: *Qui a aimé, aimera.* Perhaps he should not have said that love required variety — change was the better word. For the true lover was constant to the type, though unfaithful to the individual. Personally, he blamed Oxford for the misfortune. It was the prerogative of that noble university to restrain enthusiasm, to nip originality in the tender bud. Why did it not nip with classic claws this amorous flitting from flower to flower? He also blamed the Government. They had appointed Commissions to sit upon everything, from bovine tuberculosis to the consumption of alcohol. Why did n't they appoint a Commission to sit upon the expansive form of amativism?

The Poet thought that the Humorist, in his whimsical way, had mentioned a profound principle. *Qui a aimé, aimera.* How true it was! Yet, alas! for the poor lover, who, seeking always for the affinity of his dreams, found in successive experiments repeated disappointments. It was sad that when women were so plentiful, and so accessible, the ideal woman remained so elusive.

Lady Normacott, opening her eyes slowly, enquired: "And the ideal man?"

The Humorist said that he felt diffident, but in fairness to the community he could not take the responsibility of concealing himself any longer. Unmasked, but modest, he came forward from a mere sense of duty.

The Poet sighed. "Yes," he murmured, "we all wear masks. But greater than the mystery of the Man in the Iron Mask, is the mystery of Woman in the Eternal Mask."

"I am afraid," the Critic complained, "that I do not quite understand that enigmatic utterance."

"I myself do not quite comprehend it," the Poet answered. "Nevertheless, I know that it embraces a profound truth."

Lady Winter, seated at a little distance, smiled. Lord Daventry, approaching her, smiled at the smile.

"While these dear people are babbling," he said, "I would like to tell you a little story, which seems to me amusing. But I suggest, unless you are

fatigued, that we withdraw for a few moments from this poetical exhibition which my daughter-in-law finds so entertaining. By the lake, there are several rustic arbours, ancient and modern, in which, undistracted, one could tell an amusing story quite pleasantly."

Lady Winter's slow gaze questioned his eyes, which seemed inscrutable.

She rose.

"It is impossible to resist the temptation of an amusing story — from Lord Daventry," she said. "It will be so delightfully — original."

Lord Daventry realized that the momentary pauses were suggestive. The lines round his mouth deepened, producing the impression of an incipient grin, which flickered, and vanished, unconsummated.

"It would be impossible," he said, "not to be original — with such encouragement."

"I did not know," Lady Winter said, "that men required encouragement — from women."

"They do not require it," he answered. "But they usually receive it."

The Cynic, watching them go, shrugged his shoulders. "Beauty and the Beast?" he asked himself, and answered: "There is a good deal of both in each."

They followed the winding path to the lake. When they reached it, Lord Daventry invited his companion to sit down on one of the unpretentious

seats. She did so, without protest. It was the same bench to which Ward had taken her. Her thoughts went back to the confessions and strange intimacy of that afternoon, which, though so near, already seemed remote. Her lips, compressed by a sense of antagonism, of coming conflict, lost for a moment their hardness: she half closed her eyes, as if, in semi-darkness, to conjure back the impressions and emotions of that sudden crisis.

"You will forgive me," Lord Daventry said, "for bringing you so far merely to listen to an amusing story. But I myself went much further to hear it, in the first instance. Indeed, I consider that I went almost as far as an elderly man, with no character to lose, can be expected to go — from Clarice's, which is quite respectable when Society is out of town, to Bishop's, which is — " He twisted the handle of his ebony stick, thoughtfully — "in New York."

"It sounds rather ecclesiastical," she said, her lips hardening again.

"Yet it has no connection with the straight and narrow path of duty," he answered. "You will find it in that famous Broadway which leads so many to destruction — with its kindly lights amid the encircling gloom. Eh?"

"I have heard that Broadway is a brilliant thoroughfare," she said composedly.

The old man did not look at her. "Since my

visit to the United States," he said, "I have sometimes regretted that with the disadvantages of senile decay, which my friends attribute to me, I do not possess also some of its privileges, such as loss of memory. I would gladly efface a few unpleasant but still vivid impressions. For though I have some affection for a simple democratic community, I do not care greatly for a raw plutocracy. On one occasion I was actually compelled to dine with an assortment of millionaires — I, whom Philpotts has habituated to his own high standard. But Americans have no ancient caste of valets, and consequently no traditional code of conduct — no infallible criterion of dignity."

"Yet it seemed to me," Lady Winter observed pensively, "that American men, though sometimes unpolished, had not lost the quality of virility which is so rare in really civilized countries."

"In Europe," Lord Daventry said, "natural selection has resolved itself into feminism. In America, mere masculinity has not yet been crushed out by the preference of the women for lap-dogs. A man can still find there all the consolations of materialism, unembittered by idealism. But may I return to Bishop's? I once — and this is the amusing story I wished you to hear — dropped in at Bishop's for an after-theatre supper, with an agreeable acquaintance whom I had met at my hotel. A slight accident — I happened to swear at him —

led to the discovery that we had mutual friends — in America. I apologized, of course, for his stupidity, and we passed a pleasant evening together, finishing at Bishop's. While we were toying with terrapin, I noticed a lady at another table: it would have been difficult to avoid noticing her, for she had unusual beauty and unusual charm. I had never met her before; I did not know her name; and I certainly did not imagine that I should meet her again — any more than I should have expected, Lady Winter, to meet you — here, at this moment."

Lady Winter carefully failed to conceal a yawn. Lord Daventry, as carefully, failed to perceive her failure.

"But fate," he continued, "which has made me what I am — with a little personal assistance — has evidently determined to compensate me for that somewhat ironical creative jest. I have been permitted to see again the beautiful face which, viewed once, in an atmosphere of indolence, where people refrain from too close scrutiny or criticism, nevertheless left an indelible impression."

"That you should meet again," Lady Winter observed, "by a special effort of Providence, a pretty woman whom you once saw in a well-known restaurant, is certainly excruciatingly funny. Yet it would almost seem that the special effort of Providence would have been required to *prevent*

such a rencontre. People who move, apparently, in the same circles and have similar Bohemian tastes — that is the proper phrase, is n't it, for doubtful habits? — are liable to meet more than once without being helped by a miracle."

There was a characteristic insolence in her manner and in her slow speech, that attracted the old, cynical man of the world. For the note of crudeness, of petulance, was absent. The music of her voice seemed narcotic, dulling the sting of the words; and her beauty and perfect poise invested with charm a frankness which, from an ugly woman, would have seemed regrettable.

"Had I been even twenty years younger," he said, "it would have taken several special efforts of Providence to prevent such a meeting. For one does not see every day a face which makes the breaking of the last commandment so simple, or recognize a temperament which can appreciate so delightfully the homage of that shattered twelfth. — Somebody else had been doing a little shattering, I think," he added drily. "For the lady, though accompanied, was not accompanied by her husband. Curiously, I was."

He paused for a moment. She remained silent, and he continued: "The attitudes of the husband and wife, when they discovered each other, were poems in pose. The glances which they exchanged were optical epigrams. It appeared that this was

their first meeting since the regretted separation. Nothing could have been more delicate." He looked at the lake, cool, smooth, chromatic. "Really, Lady Winter, I congratulate you on your taste in husbands."

He expected her to be disconcerted. Looking at him steadily, she laughed — a low, rippling laugh of amusement.

"What a long time you have taken," she said, "to tell me that I was discovered. But really, you know, if I choose to retain the name of my first husband, and to be discreetly silent about — the other — is n't it, after all, just my own affair, and nobody else's?" There was a challenge, and something of contempt, in her calm survey.

"Assuredly, it is your own affair," he replied with composure — "unless you choose to make it mine also. I imagined that the secret would remain buried in this sympathetic breast, which has sepulchred so many mysteries, so many of those ghostly skeletons of conscience that haunt the fair and frail. Eh? But there are occasions when it is cruel to be kind, and one of those occasions, I think, is when a lady is so — indiscreet — as to allow herself to become — almost — a somnambulist. There is always the sad and dangerous possibility that she might wander into — the wrong room."

"I am afraid I am not interested in somnambulism," she said.

"I used the word strictly as a euphemism," he replied. "It is not necessary for a lady to be a somnambulist in order to open her door at an hour when doors should be severely closed. But I consider it is always more polite to be pleasant, and more pleasant to be polite. Besides, one can often hurt a great deal more. Eh? You see, it was quite simple. I heard a key turn. You will excuse my inexcusable curiosity? It is so long since I was familiar with the turning of keys." He looked at her for a little while; then, dropping his bantering tone, spoke with a directness and earnestness that seemed strange from those lips, moulded by sneers, inured to cynicism.

"Lady Winter," he said, "I am going to make an appeal to you, and I think you will not disregard it. If I read you rightly — and I have been considered a good judge of women — there can be few moods of emotion that you have not tested, few character-riddles, complex or shallow, that you have not solved. You have had your triumphs and your amusement, and no doubt your deeper feelings. Monotonous your life can scarcely have been. You are not in the position of a woman who has lived through dreary days, dreaming vaguely of this game of love, but playing no part in it until, perhaps, fate gives her her chance at last and provides her with a master — or a toy. One could not expect her to surrender either of

these gifts light-heartedly. But you have no starved and gnawing instincts clamant for their food. If not satiated, you have at least dined lingeringly and well." He relapsed for a moment into his customary manner.

"An admirable metaphor," she murmured. "How well — really — you understand women. It is extraordinary."

"I do not wish to offend you," Lord Daventry said. "But I assume that you have had lovers — it is impossible that you should not have had — lovers of many types, strong, weak, experienced, ingenuous. One more or less can make little difference. Now it is obvious to you, and to me, that my grandson is infatuated with you. I do not blame him, but I do ask you to make it easier for him to conquer a passion which could so easily make shipwreck of his life. I have been proud of John. I know well, though he does not know that I know, how strong and remorseless his temptations have been: for we have wild blood in our veins, and I am very sure that what I inherited in the way of deviltry, I transmitted with compound interest added. John must have had many a struggle with the beast within him. Yet he has gone steadfastly on his way, without making any fuss about it. Lady Winter, you are not — forgive me — a good woman. It is a strange thing for me to say that. I could not say it under any other conditions. But

an old man who has seen and done much evil, can recognize his own type, though it be incarnated in a form so beautiful. I speak to you as a comrade to a cǫmrade: not condemning; understanding perfectly; but compelled to speak by the one duty that I hold sacred."

"You are quite right," she said composedly. "I admit frankly that I am not a good woman. I have already acknowledged the truth to your grandson."

Lord Daventry was puzzled. "You are more subtle or more simple than I conceived," he said. "But let it pass. — Lady Winter, send my boy from you, kill this infatuation of his. You can do it. You know well that, your — love — would be a fatal gift for him. He must not yield to this allurement of lips and eyes and soft white limbs. Once flesh the carnal devil that is in him, and Heaven knows what the end would be. I think I know, also. Lady Winter, my grandson is a brave man. He imagines that I mock him when I call him, as I often do, Saint John. Perhaps he is right. The gift of sneering which I possess so comprehensively tends to develop into a habit. But if I have mocked him, there was something beneath the mockery. I see in him what I might have been. I see in him also another possibility — that he may become what I am. And God forbid!" The lines in his face deepened.

Lady Winter was astonished at this revelation

of feeling in one whom she had considered cynical, self-centred, withered emotionally.

"You have been very frank," she said. "I will be equally frank with you. You say I am not a good woman. I am not. You say I have had lovers. I have. You say you understand women. It is a delightful gift which I do not share. I am merely one of those peculiar women, Lord Daventry, who understand perfectly that they cannot hope to understand themselves. Most women are so delightfully normal that they never admit that they are incomprehensible. They have been persuaded, by generations of flattery, that they have a remarkable gift called intuition, which enables them to be infallible without being logical. They really believe this. They believe that they can read character at a glance. They even believe that they can think. But not one woman in a thousand really *can* think. They mistake reflex actions for reflection. A woman does not think — she emotionalizes. She does not know — she feels. She does not read character — she invents it. Consequently she makes mistakes, perpetually. But she does not realize that she has made mistakes, because she has no thought-standards. She has only emotion-standards. When her interest wanes, her passion dwindles, she does not ask why; she is merely conscious of the desire for a change. When her interest increases and her passion intensifies, it is no good asking her to be rational. She is too busy being a woman."

"It is an occupation that no doubt takes a great deal of time," Lord Daventry said. "A very pleasing occupation. But I do not quite understand — "

"You wonder what I mean? " Lady Winter asked. "I don't know. I am trying to find out. Of course, you will think I am strange. I cannot help it. I do not wish to help it. I am a woman, you see. I must go my own way and work out my own destiny."

Lord Daventry stiffened. "You are not divorced, I believe? " he said.

"No," she returned with composure. "I am not divorced."

"It is impossible for you, therefore, to marry my grandson," he continued.

She smiled at him, gently. "Really," she said, "— such trifles — need we discuss them, you and I? "

"Am I to understand," he enquired, deliberately, "that you are a candidate for the position of my grandson's mistress? "

She smiled again. "How quaintly you put things," she murmured. "No doubt it is because you understand women so well."

Lord Daventry recognized that the discussion was over.

"I apologize," he said, "for my lapse into sentimentality, which of course seemed as ridiculous to you, as it now appears painful to me. It will be a long time, I fancy, before I again forget the

wiser habits of a lifetime hitherto unstained by any foolish consideration for other people."

"A modern Bayard," she laughed. "But your grandson, Lord Daventry, belongs to the older type, I think." She rose.

"You will of course be interested in finding out," he said. "But if we were back in that delightful feudal age, you would probably be interested in trying to find your way out of the lake, to which I should certainly have consigned you. However, as this is the twentieth century — " He shrugged his shoulders.

She finished the sentence.

"We have to live up to the high standard of decadence." She added, inconsequently: "By the way, you have not, I presume, bored yourself by discussing my second marriage with — anyone? "

"I believe I mentioned the fact to my grandson," he returned drily.

"I thought there were certain things one did n't do," she said.

"Where women are concerned, nothing is impossible," he answered. "You see, I imagined that John might be interested. Besides, it was an obvious precaution."

She flushed a little. "Against what? "

His lips twitched, then drooped at the corners.

"Shall we say — excessive somnambulism? " he suggested.

CHAPTER XIII

COFFEE was served on the veranda. As the twilight became more shadowed, the poets talked, half seriously, of the happiness of the uninspired; the women talked, half mockingly, of the inspiration of the unhappy; the Critic, uncritical, listened dreamily; and the Cynic, uncynical, composed a sonnet, which he recited to the Greatest Living Novelist. Only the Humorist was wholly unhappy. Looking upward to where the stars should shine, he felt that he was misunderstood. The world did not comprehend the tragedy of a breaking heart which he concealed with light laughter and merry jests. Without recognition, without sympathy, his heart must continue its lonely breaking. The tragedy was unknown, wasted. He looked at the Cynic, wallowing in appreciation, and felt that life's little ironies were too deep for concealment.

Ward, watching and listening, realized that to say nothing of importance, and to say it cleverly, required less skill than to say a really clever thing as if it were nothing of importance. The game amused him.

One by one, the stars began to glitter, and the

tenuous light of the moon wavered through the air, making the darkness visible, rather than obliterating it. But gradually, the thin waves became a silver flood: the terraced gardens were revealed, with their winding paths, their oases of colourless flowers, their rectangles and ordered figures: and in the distance, the woods stood out, clear yet mysterious; silent, sinister, seductive.

The Poet Who Had Wandered began to tell tales of Stevenson and his island home; of Lafcadio Hearn and his chosen exile; of Wilde, and Thompson, and that poet named Narcissus, who had once been young. And as he spoke, he perceived that he was speaking of the dead; for those who have been young, are also dead, and Narcissus would be young no more. His voice began to falter and his words came slowly and at longer intervals. At last they ceased. Quietly, he slipped away, for he was a wanderer, and the lit woods called him. Soon, the Cynic followed, meditating another sonnet; the Greatest Living Novelist, patient still, went with him. Two by two, or one by one, the others drifted away. The Humorist took his breaking heart into the lonely night. The American Poet went forth, with long strides, to adumbrate a sunrise. Only the Poet Who Had Remained at Home lingered, true to his traditions, in his chair. He was asleep.

Lady Winter and Ward had risen together, as if at the same signal. She looked across at him,

and turned. He followed her. They went once more to the lake; and there, tranquillized at first by the stillness and splendour of the night, they sat together.

They were silent for some time. Ward felt curiously impersonal, detached. After the delirium of the preceding night, he appeared immune from fitful fevers; in that flame of passion, his character seemed to have crystallized. His brain was clear, his blood cool. He was no longer a battleground for conflicting forces.

It is as easy for a woman, as for a man, to recognize the varying shades of feeling in those who are near to them, to know when emotion responds to emotion, when desires are sympathetic, and passion is unchecked by doubt. And when moods change, when the attraction of sex is complicated by subtle currents of aloofness, she requires no overt announcement. Her intuition, useless in affairs, is invaluable in amours.

Ward's self-control was obvious to Lady Winter. His attitude was that of a man who has passed beyond passion, rather than of one who merely restrains himself, superbly or through fear. He radiated coldness, inaccessibility. She was distressed: the air seemed chilled, the beauty of the summer night was tinged with the foreshadowing of winter bareness. So easily is fact coloured or etiolated by fancy, so easily is matter denuded or

garlanded to correspond with the transient emotions of mind.

It seemed to her that she had no longer a lover whom she could tantalize or delight, weaving the hours into music, or shattering them into discords. Would he indeed tread no more the measures of the immemorial dance, follow no more the lure of beauty and strange tempting? And as the fashion of the courtesan dropped from her, useless now, she craved for his love with a torturing vehemence. His reserve invested him with a new power: for all women are at heart oriental. They may yield to the entreaties of their slaves, but invariably with something of contempt. At the command of a master, confident and serene, they will render not only the things that are Cæsar's, but the things that are God's.

At last she leaned toward him. "Dear," she said: "You called me last night. You wanted me."

"Yes," he answered.

"I do not know what happened," she said. "I tried to come to you, but everything is strange, as if I had been dreaming: blurred, unreal. I was frightened, yet I do not know why."

"Dreams in the night," he said. "Why recall them?"

"I want to understand," she said. "You called me; I tried to come to you. It was as if I were

asleep, almost. But someone passed. I could not come; there were eyes watching. I could see them; they burnt me. And suddenly I was in a strange room. There was light at first, then darkness. I can remember no more — except a face bending over me — your face: yet not yours; changed, hard, remorseless. In shadow. I saw it, in the darkness. How?"

"And after?" he asked.

"I do not remember," she said.

"You were dreaming," he said.

"No," she said. "It was your dream, if a dream at all; and I was just a part of it."

He was silent.

"What did it mean?" she asked. "Please tell me."

"What does it matter?" he returned. "We come and go. We have lived and shall live. Why cannot we learn wisdom?"

She had leaned nearer to him. He drew away.

"You are changed," she said, not accusingly, but as stating a simple fact.

"Yes," he said. "I am changed."

"Your grandfather has been talking to you," she said. "He has told you half-truths. You see, he thinks he understands women so well. He has made you see me as he sees me. He has painted me as a wanton; shameless; bad."

"I have no interest in anything my grandfather

might say," he answered coldly. "I choose for myself; think for myself."

"No," she said. "You have been biassed, or you would not seem so different. I was frank with you. I told you I was not a normal woman. I did not think you cared for mere details."

"A husband is not a mere detail," he said drily.

"What does the past matter?" she asked swiftly. "There is all the glorious future — and you worry about dead years."

"No," he said. "I am not worrying. But I do not believe in repeating mistakes, whatever the temptation. One has to foresee the future, and the future is not always glorious."

She looked at his face in the moonlight: pale, resolute.

"You have seen something," she said. "My dream — the darkness. Why don't you tell me? You are not fair. I am not afraid. What must be, must."

"You are wrong," he said. "The future is only unchangeable when one accepts it." He rose. "I do not wish to talk to-night," he said. "Shall we go back?"

She stood beside him. Suddenly, her arms were round his neck, her lips on his. He did not move; made no response; waited. For minutes, they stood so. Then, with a cry of pain, she drew away from him, and they went back to the house.

PART III
THE PIT

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THE PIT

CHAPTER I

MISS SANDS — amiable and admirable woman — had been Ward's housekeeper since the second month after his establishment in the Newchurch district. She had never failed to nourish him with affectionate care and the proper proportion of proteids, phosphates, carbohydrates and hydro-carbons. Meal times were somewhat irregular when the doctor was busy; but her punctual observance of these unpunctual hours was remarkable. Food was the subtle instrument from which she extracted perfect harmony. There was no bad cooking, and no discord, in that serenely ordered household. However unexpected the demand might seem, she rarely permitted herself to be unprepared; and on the few occasions when her foresight had failed, her resourcefulness carried her nobly to new triumphs. She could extemporize in dinners as a maestro in melodies. There was clarity in her soup, lightness in her fish, delicacy in her

mutton, firmness yet tenderness in her beef, superb simplicity in her vegetables, and inspiration in her chickens. Her coffee was good.

It is necessary to mention these details in order to show that Miss Sands, though a woman, was domestic, and though domestic, idealistic. For Ward, in spite of his home traditions, was sufficiently Cæsarian — until her influence redeemed him — to dine contentedly on the memory of lunch, and sup on bread and water. With something of Spartan contempt for the epicure or student of menus, he had eaten merely that he might live. Miss Sands, however, had revealed to him the importance of perfection. If it be desirable to live, it is desirable to live with all the senses — so far as personal effort may aid — unclogged, energized, alert. If it be desirable to eat at all, it is desirable to eat with devotion. He ate. Miss Sands supplied the devotion.

Mr. Balding, publican and churchwarden, was also offering devotion. He wished to supply Miss Sands. Pink, corpulent, prosperous, he was certainly far remote from that famous prototype who filled with nectar the cups of the gods. The nectar supplied by Mr. Balding was less ethereal, though not less intoxicating. But the little man was esteemed by all who knew him. Experience had made him wise: he was just, yet gentle; sincere, yet tactful. Though his speech was occasionally imperfect,

his honour was unimpeachable. Without being pompous, he had dignity. Without being conceited, he had confidence. Without being arrogant or apologetic, he had a sister.

It was this point, capably appreciated, which perplexed Miss Sands — in addition to other perplexities. She had grave doubts with regard to Miss Balding — not as a woman and a sister, but as a sister-in-law. Balding himself, she liked; she had become accustomed to the self-reliant, unobtrusive churchwarden. Friendship is a habit, and she had cultivated that habit. Gradually, she had ceased to notice the little man's deficiencies, while his genuineness and simple force of character revealed themselves more and more clearly. She became used to him: soon, she became almost fond of him. The conditions of their early training had been very different, but Miss Sands had observed that many polished gentlemen were so pleasantly occupied in making their wives miserable, that they forgot to radiate serenity in their homes. Besides, she had reached a mature age, and no gentleman of charm and distinction had yet entreated her to share his name and monopolize his affections. The years had passed, and were passing; she had outgrown the craving for glitter: a quiet domestic life, with a quiet domestic husband, was the limit of her ambition. She was therefore neither shocked nor displeased when Balding suggested that he might

sell the inn and the grocery store and buy or construct a habitable house, with a veranda, a garden, and a pianola, if she would only — but of course it was impossible —

Miss Sands could give him no passionate encouragement; but when she considered the sum of their ages, and the difference of their waist measurements, she realized that they might be happy without being ardent. Even on the pianola plane of existence, there were compensations. In her own home, with her own husband and her own way, she could regard the passing of the days with composure and content; whatever the future might bring, she could face it without the feeling of dependence and helplessness. Fond as she was of Dr. Ward, he was her employer, though her friend. She was no longer young: it would be foolish to undervalue a husband. As her chance had been delayed so long, even the monotony of an ordinary marriage would be a novelty to her. She knew that she had unusual gifts: she would use them. Age might wither gradually her charm of feature and form, but custom should not stale her infinite variety of resource. She believed in her power to idealize the commonplace. Balding was commonplace. She would idealize him.

But could she idealize his sister? Miss Balding had lived with her brother for many years; she had no other near relatives. All her interests were

centred in the district. To expect her, now, to change her mode of life would be almost an outrage. Yet the privacy of marriage cannot be lightly surrendered. Miss Sands contemplated regretfully the prospect of two women in one house, on terms of perpetual intimacy, but perhaps without sympathy or affection. Had she the right to risk a situation so hazardous and unusual?

She determined to study Miss Balding before taking an irrevocable step; to probe her disposition and discover as completely as possible her character and inclinations. It was natural that she should, at the same time, innocently display her own strongest points. It occurred to her that a little dinner would provide the most suitable opportunity. She considered the idea, amply; approved it; proceeded to carry it into effect.

Dr. Lyster, the locum tenens, was a methodical man, and had the excellent habit of keeping a methodical register of engagements. Brief but lucid details, recorded in a desk-diary, made it possible to trace him in any emergency. Miss Sands, consulting the diary on Monday, found that he had arranged to dine at the vicarage on the ensuing Wednesday. Promptly, she issued cordial invitations — which were accepted — to Mr. and Miss Balding; and devised a dinner that should do justice to her genius.

Wednesday evening arrived; Dr. Lyster departed. Miss Sands, after supervising the kitchen preparations, had dressed to receive her guests: now, she awaited them. Occasionally, cool and composed, she strayed to the kitchen, where her understudy kept faithful vigil.

At this juncture, Ward, returning from Daventry, quietly appeared — unannounced, unexpected; and, for this one evening, absolutely undesired. He had walked up from the station; entered, as usual, through the surgery; and passed on into the hall. There, he paused, aware of the odour of cooking: it seemed to him that he could detect, specially and separately, the aroma of plump chickens delicately browning —

Miss Sands, emerging from the kitchen, perceived him. For one brief moment, anguish possessed her. How would his arrival affect her dinner? How could she explain to him that she had invited her friends to visit his house, occupy his dining-room, regale themselves with his provisions — ?

"Oh!" she said weakly.

"You did n't expect me?" he asked.

She shook her head. "I certainly did n't."

"I will go up and wash," he said. "The atmosphere of the Smokeries is undeniably opaque. But I am glad to be back again." He paused on the first step. "Is Dr. Lyster in?"

"He is dining at the vicarage to-night," she re-

plied, thinking ruefully of the little affair she had planned in consequence of that engagement.

Ward went upstairs.

The front door bell rang.

Miss Sands, without forming any new scheme of action, responded mechanically. She opened the door. Mr. Balding, carefully dressed, very pink, and alone, revealed himself. Removing his hat, he entered.

"My sister," he explained, "had a headache, I am sorry to say; a very severe headache. She sends her kind regards, and will you please excuse her? — I tell you what it is, Miss Sands: she eats too much and walks too little, and that 's the real truth. But of course I could n't tell *her*. She 'd be that worrited goodness knows what 'd happen. So I just came along myself, hoping you would n't mind."

Miss Sands regarded him sadly. "It 's a pity," she said. "I 'd been looking forward so much to meeting her — and *you*. But it would n't *quite* do, I 'm afraid, for us to dine alone — just you and I, without a chaperon, you know. It seems silly, of course, but it 's a wise rule for eight people out of ten, and those who don't need it must put up with it for the sake of those who do."

Balding, though disappointed, offered no protest. "You 're quite right," he said. "Quite right. I ought to have thought of that, but what with being

busy, and then that headache coming like a bolt from — from — " He filled in the blank resourcefully with a wave of his hand — " I was all of a flutter, in a manner of speaking. But you 're right, Miss Sands. I see that clearly. May be, some other time — " He paused, and glanced at the stairs, which Ward was now descending.

" It 's Dr. Ward," Miss Sands whispered. " He 's just come home, unexpectedly."

" Then I won't stay," Balding returned hastily, realizing that the doctor's return might have had something to do with Miss Sands' views of a dinner without a duenna. " I 'll just — "

But Ward had perceived him.

" Why, Balding! " he said.

" I just called," the churchwarden explained, " to consult Miss Sands about — er — a little church matter, in a manner of speaking. But I 'm glad to see you back, sir, and I hope you 've had a pleasant change. I 'll wish you good evening, sir."

" Better stay and have dinner with me," Ward said. " Very pleased if you will. You can tell me all the news, you know. Miss Sands will find something for us, I daresay. She 's wonderful, Balding. No matter what time I come in, or however unexpected I may be, she can always rise to the occasion." He sniffed, discerningly. " Let me hang your hat up. In five minutes, I assure you — I

speak from experience — dinner will be ready. — Miss Sands, you will join us to-night, I hope? "

Miss Sands, murmuring that she would, retreated to the kitchen, avoiding the eye of the pink churchwarden.

The doctor took his guest into the study. In five minutes, as he had confidently foretold, dinner was served. Accustomed as he was to her achievements, he was a trifle surprised at the way in which Miss Sands welcomed him.

" Conceive it, Balding," he said. " I was totally unexpected, and yet this is the kind of thing she provides without an effort. How does she manage it? I confess I cannot understand it at all."

" It 's a gift," the churchwarden said. " That 's what it is — a gift. I 'm mighty glad I — er — happened to call. Mighty glad."

He did not look at Miss Sands.

" And now," Ward said, " tell me all the news, Balding. How is the vicar? "

The churchwarden shook his head, ominously. " I 'm afraid he 's aging," he said. " Yes, in a manner of speaking, I 'm afraid he 's aging."

" One must expect that," Ward said, " when one is old. And the vicar is old, Balding."

" Aye; but he 's older than he was, and he shows it, sir. Times, he 's absent-minded, and times, he seems sad, as if he was brooding over something

that hurt. — They do say," he added, "that Mr. Harold is coming home again, from foreign parts."

"Who has said so?" Ward asked.

For a moment, the churchwarden hesitated. "Well," he replied, "I can't say, in a manner of speaking, that anyone 's told me. But there 've been letters, with foreign stamps on them — "

Ward remembered that Balding included, in his various duties, those of village postmaster. He smiled as he thought of the careful inspection that the mail evidently received.

"But you cannot tell what was in the letters, merely from the stamps on the outside," he suggested.

"There were postcards as well," Balding said, with simple frankness.

Ward made no direct comment.

"The vicar ought to look younger if his son is coming home again; not older," he observed.

"Yes," Balding agreed. "He ought. But he does n't. It 's my opinion he 's brooding about something; just brooding, that 's what it is. I tell you, sir, it hurts me to see him come into the vestry of a Sunday evening, so slow and feeble, and with that look in his eyes as if he was n't there at all. And when he preaches, it 's nothing more nor less than creepy, and that 's the real truth. I 'm not the only one that 's noticed it. He 'll stand up in the pulpit for all the world as if he was blind and did n't see the congregation. Right through

them he looks, as if he was talking to their shadows, or their ghosts, may be. And his sermons are different from what they used to be. There 's something in them that I can't rightly make out. Miss Sands, *she* 's noticed it."

He looked enquiringly at the housekeeper.

"Yes," she admitted. "I have noticed. There certainly is something almost creepy in the way he 's been preaching lately."

"There 's some as say," the churchwarden continued, "that a great and wonderful change has come over him. Good, he always was, but so gentle, and so forgiving. And now, it 's like as if the mantle of the Lord had descended upon him, with the gift of awful words. 'Go, and sin no more,' was his text last Sunday; and oh, but he made us feel it! There was some of the women sobbing — was n't there, Miss Sands? — and there was some of the men that felt like it; and that I know. And at the end he just repeated his text: 'Go, and sin no more,' and he lifted his hands. 'For the wages of sin is death,' he said. Just that; and I tell you, it seemed as if Death was in the church, so silent it was, and so awesome."

The little churchwarden had succumbed to his own graphic description: his voice was hushed; he looked round, timorously, yet with shining eyes. Ward, with a feeling that he was committing sacrilege, pressed him to take some more mutton.

"And Mr. Morrison?" he asked. "Has he also been numbered with the prophets since I went away?"

"Well," Balding answered, "I can't rightly say. There 's a change in him too, but it 's not quite the same sort of change. He 's cheerful, Mr. Morrison is, as he always has been, and that 's what 's made him liked, yes, and loved. Yet he 's different. For one thing, he looks pale —"

"His complexion was never violently vermilion," Ward interposed.

"That 's so," Balding agreed. "But it is n't a healthy pale that he looks now; it 's a melancholy pale. He looks worried; that 's what it is. I should n't wonder, in a manner of speaking, if he had n't fallen in love. Love," he continued, gazing deliberately at Miss Sands, "plays havoc with some men, and that 's the real truth." He paused for a moment. "There 's young Harry Poole, now, that 's been made under-manager at the Chayle colliery, and a smart young man, too. *He* 's in love. Anybody could tell that. But he does n't take it the same way as Mr. Morrison. He 's happy; and that 's a very different thing from trying to seem cheerful. He 's full of life and vigour, Poole is. He 's a hopeful kind of look on him. He 's sure of his sweetheart and he 's thinking of a home of his own, with somebody in it to welcome him when he 's through with his work. And that makes a

difference to a man. It 's when you 're doubtful, and the straight path ahead seems crooked, somehow, that you begin to wear a worried look, like Mr. Morrison does." Melancholy, carefully contrived, sat on his own countenance.

"I like Poole," Ward remarked. "He 's a bright, clever lad. Whom is he going to marry, Balding — if it is n't a post-office secret?"

"Well, I rather fancy," the churchwarden said, "that it 's Miss Heath."

"What? Alice?" Miss Sands asked.

"Miss Lydia, not Miss Alice," Balding explained. "And a bright, pleasant, sensible young lady, too, that will make a rare good wife. And wives like that are n't as thick as berries," he added, thoughtfully. "When a man gets a wife like Miss Lydia, he ought to be proud and grateful; that 's what he ought to be." He was about to sigh, when he perceived the glimmer of a smile on Miss Sands' mobile lips. Responsively, he became cheerful. Melancholy fled from him. He began to chat lightly of the small happenings of the district, choosing the more whimsical details and disclosing a shrewd sense of humour. Ward, with an abrupt question, recalled him to serious topics.

"How does Mrs. Harrington seem?" he asked. "Has she been to church lately?"

"Every Sunday," Balding answered. He lowered his voice, remembering that her life had been

associated with tragedy. "She 's another that 's changed," he said. "Of course, we know why — losing her boy, and all that. But there 's something in her face that I can't hardly tell you. Times, she 's sad, and you can tell what she 's thinking about, and then again, there 's times when I 've seen her smile, in a manner of speaking — just the palest, thinnest kind of a smile. She 'll sit and look at the vicar when he 's preaching, and the vicar, he 'll look through her and away beyond, and never know she 's there. And when he lifts his voice and calls not the righteous but sinners to repentance; or when he lowers his voice — and yet speaks so clear and distinct — and says the wages of sin is death, so that your blood creeps, as if the angels and archangels was hovering with drawn swords round your head, — it 's then she 'll smile in that fixed, wan sort of way, as if she knew what he meant as well as he did himself, and better, perhaps. But there 's something more, as I was saying, that I can't hardly make out. First I thought it was like as if she 'd tied something round her heart, to stop it breaking, and then I thought it was as if she was seeing things that the Lord hath kept hidden from ordinary people — like the meaning of sorrow, and visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation — "

"These chickens," Ward observed, "are worthy even of your genius, Miss Sands." He dissected

one, with surgical ease. Gradually, the conversation drifted into lighter channels again.

Balding did not linger unduly, after dinner was over. He smoked one of Ward's cigars, appreciatively; drank Miss Sands' coffee, resignedly, not knowing that it was beyond praise; and declared that he must go. Ward, glad to be back in the place that he had chosen as his real home, had the desire of a returned wanderer to retrace familiar paths and view again, even in the dimness of the night, the scenes interwoven with so many memories. He went out with the churchwarden and walked the greater part of the way to Newchurch. As he came back, he passed the little cottage where Lydia and Alice Heath had lived since their father's death. The lower storey was in darkness; but upstairs, in the bedroom which they shared, there was still a light. He saw on the blind the shadow of a lifted arm.

As he walked on, he contrasted the simple, laborious lives of these girls with the idleness and hedonism of some of the women whom he had met at Daventry. Lydia Heath had her trying day's task as a school teacher and her continued work at night in preparation for the morrow: Alice had her long round of scantly-paid music lessons; her tiring tramps in all weathers, to save train and car fares; and her necessary practising. Both had, in addition, the domestic work of the cottage; the cleaning

and washing; the mending, contriving and altering of clothes. Yet they remained cheerful and contented, finding their modest pleasure in the little social reunions of the district, and moving serenely and purely, though not uncomprehendingly, through surroundings often sad and sordid. Were they less subtle, he wondered, than women like Lady Winter; were their sensations more obtuse and primitive; did they suffer less acutely, and feel even joy less keenly, than those who considered themselves more finely moulded, more delicately organized, more intensely and perplexingly emotional? He doubted, knowing that mere neurotic waywardness is often mistaken for subtlety of intellect and character.

In the bedroom, Lydia, clothed with grace, but with very little else, was imprisoning her hair deftly with celluloid hairpins. Alice had already completed that disfiguring process; a little rotund as to the head, she sat, white-gowned, by the lamp, reading her nightly chapter from the Bible. She had come to St. Matthew's account of the sacrifice of John the Baptist: familiar as it was, the gruesome story awed her. Ignorant of Maude Allan and Gertrude Hoffmann, she pictured the bewildering dancing of Salome; the sensuous wine-frenzy of the Court; the oath and sudden silence of the King. She thought of the swift tragedy in the cell; of the bloody dismemberment, the dripping

head — "And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison" . . . Shuddering, she closed the Book, and kneeling, commenced her prayers.

"I wonder," Lydia said, "whether it is really true that Mr. Balding is going to marry Miss Sands? Harry says he 's almost absolutely sure Mr. Balding 's head over heels in love. It seems absurd, at his age. And he is n't romantic, is he? I don't think Miss Sands could really think of marrying him. I expect she 's just thinking of *marriage*, and feeling sort of out of it. She can't help that. But I don't think she 'd leave a man like Dr. Ward for a fattish sort of man like Mr. Balding. Do you?"

Alice, finishing the Lord's Prayer, tried earnestly not to hear these distracting remarks.

"I suppose Dr. Ward would be cross if he found he was going to lose his housekeeper as soon as he got back," Lydia continued. "I wonder when he *will* come back? It must be nice to have friends like his, and heaps of money, and a home that your family have lived in since caves went out of fashion — a home full of beautiful things that it 's taken centuries to get together. It seems as if it would take *us* centuries to get very little together, does n't it? — If I were to become really rich all at once, do you know what I should do, first thing? I should just go out and have a horrid, wicked, disgusting gorge on ice-cream. I know I should.

I 've been pining for ice-cream for weeks; have n't you? "

Alice, with a protesting wriggle of one leg, continued her devotions; but concentration was difficult.

The silence seemed pointed and Lydia turned round enquiringly. Perceiving Alice kneeling, she rebuked herself for thrusting ice-cream into sacred meditations. By the time her sister rose to her feet, Lydia, robed and serene, was saying her prayers on the other side of the bed. When she also had finished, she put out the lamp, drew up the blind, opened the window, and then quietly lay down in her place.

It was a windless night. The silence seemed profound. Yet, at moments, there was a faint murmur — the blended tumult of collieries and ironworks, beaten into thinness by distance.

After a little while, Lydia, stretching out her hand, found and imprisoned Alice's fingers. So they rested, till thought overflowed in speech.

" Alice? "

" Yes, dear? "

" I 'm *so* happy."

" I 'm so glad."

There was a brief pause.

" Alice? "

" Yes? "

" I did n't know that anybody could ever be *quite* so happy. Is n't it wonderful? "

Alice pressed her sister's hand.

"And I used to be so different — so irritable, and snappy, and contradictory, and horrid — "

"No, you were n't, dear."

"I was!" wailed Lydia. "Don't you remember that evening when you wanted tinned lobster for supper, and I said it would give you indigestion, and you said it would n't, and I said it would, and you could please yourself and be horrid if you liked? And you ate it, and I sulked, and we did n't even say good-night. And how we could say our prayers I don't know!"

"Well, it *did* give me indigestion," said Alice soothingly. "I had a horrid night and all sorts of crawly dreams. So you were quite right."

"No, I was n't. I was horrid about it. Why should n't you have indigestion, if you wanted to, and crawly dreams as well? I need n't go and spoil it all out of pure selfishness."

"You only tried to save me from being ill."

"I did n't. I *hoped* you 'd be ill. I *wanted* you to eat the lobster and be as ill as anything, just to show you that I was right when I said you would be. I was wicked."

Alice laughed.

"I *was*," Lydia persisted. "And then there was that time when you asked me to trim your hat, and I would n't, and said 'trim it yourself,' simply because I 'd got tired in school and felt upset. That

was n't your fault, and you can't say it was, and I was horrid again."

"But why should n't I trim my own hat, after all?"

"Why? Because it was my place to trim it, and I ought to have been ashamed of myself. You know I can do that kind of thing better than you can, just as you are cleverer in cooking, and making pastry, and with your violin, and with custards and all kinds of things."

"But you did trim the hat for me, you know," Alice pointed out.

"Yes, but not till I 'd been horrid about it."

"I did n't think you were horrid. I knew you were only tired."

"I feel as if I could never be horrid again," Lydia said dreamily. "And I feel so ashamed of all the silly and bad-tempered and careless things I have ever done. They don't seem to *belong* to me, somehow, now. Dear, life is so wonderful, and full of a feeling that is like music, only there is colour in it as well. I have such beautiful thoughts, without *trying* to think them at all. They just come. Things that have often puzzled me don't appear important any more. It is a good, bright world, not a sad and evil one. The little things that used to bother one — pain, and being tired, and having to see so much suffering — dear, they are almost blotted out. It is n't that one is merely

selfish. But the doubts have gone. He Who made women capable of such exquisite joy — surely He cannot make mistakes! Whatever He does, must be well done. He knows. He knows how I feel now. He knows what love means. He created love."

Alice was silent. She had never heard her sister speak like this before.

"There are some people," Lydia went on, "who judge men by the clothes they wear, and their boots, and the way in which they order a dinner at a restaurant or a hotel. I can't do that. I want a man who looks manly always, in rough working clothes as well as in a new suit with all the latest touches. I suppose there is something savage and primitive in me, Alice, after all; for I can't help despising a man who does n't look as if he could lift things, and fight if he had to fight, and dig, and hunt, and grapple with the dangers that nature hides, till she lets them loose suddenly. And Harry is so strong, and firm, and yet so gentle with me always. I went up to the colliery once, and saw him; and he was grimy and stained, but he looked so masterful and full of power. And he is a gentleman, Alice — in his thoughts and in his ways; not just a working-man who 's been promoted because he 'd more brains than the others. You won't think I 'm snobbish, will you? I like a man who works, but some of the people who call

themselves working-men, and talk of the dignity of labour, seem to think they 're God's equals because they 're muddy inside and out, and never dream of washing the mud off." She stopped. "There, now! I 'm saying horrid things again!"

Alice ignored the self-accusation. "I hope you will be very happy," she whispered.

"Just think," Lydia whispered back. "Only next month. And we shall be together — in a home of our own — and yours," she added, almost fiercely. "Always yours, darling, — till you cannot stay any longer because somebody else wants you so badly."

There was silence for a little while. Then Lydia realized that Alice was crying.

"What is it, darling?" she asked, drawing her closer. "I have n't hurt you, have I? Surely I have n't said anything to hurt you? You know I would n't do that, dearie, don't you?"

"It — it is n't you," Alice sobbed.

Lydia took her in her arms. "Tell me, dear. Have you had a quarrel? Is that it? Is that why Mr. Morrison has n't called this week?"

"I — I have n't quarrelled," Alice said. "But he — he has n't spoken to me — for ten days. And — yesterday — he — pretended — not to see me. And — I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do!"

Perplexed and grieved, the girl had concealed her sorrow until wise and kindly nature insisted on the

relief of tears, and Lydia, wise also with the knowledge that love had taught her, forbore further questioning.

"It will all come right, dear," she said. "It will all come right."

But the optimism of the happy seems incredible to the stricken and sad-hearted. One can conceive no greater darkness than that of the unlit night, until one has descended into the Pit.

CHAPTER II

TWO days later, the curate paid an unannounced visit to Ward, who had not seen him since his return from Daventry. Dr. Lyster, the locum tenens, had gone, and Ward was alone in his surgery when Morrison, finding the door open, walked in.

"Busy?" he asked. "You know, I envy you your power to juggle with big and little bottles and look wise, as if you understood all mysteries, chemical, alembical and allotropical. Whereas, of course, you are perfectly ignorant of what everything really means and why it is precisely what it is n't, and is n't what it is. But don't worry. Go right on and be scientific. And by the way, good-afternoon. Hope you 've had a lazy, happy time, and are quite prepared for a rush of work. You are so popular, you see, that now you 've come back everyone will be ill for a little while, just as a delicate compliment." He picked up a bottle of black-currant lozenges and enquiringly absorbed two. "Far be it from me," he added, "to suggest that I myself have come to ask you anything or to appeal to your professional skill. But whenever —

if ever — you have a few days or weeks to spare and can concentrate with knitted brows upon a peculiar and unparalleled case — behold your victim." He absorbed two more lozenges, and replaced the bottle, regretfully. "My greatest weakness," he said. "I have for black-currant lozenges the affection that other great men — notably financiers — reserve for objects of vertu, if they are sufficiently expensive to be considered interesting or beautiful." Ostentatiously, he put down a penny. "No wonder you get rich," he observed. "How does it feel to be a plutocrat?"

Ward had been preparing a bottle of medicine. He carefully wrapped it up, affixed a label, and sealed the covering with wax.

"That is the longest series of remarks I ever heard you make," he said; "unofficially, of course, and pulpit-barred. Better come into the other room and let me feel your pulse. It seems to me like a highly complicated and dangerous case of humorous degeneration and cerebral paralysis."

There was a kindly twinkle in his eyes as he led the way into his consulting room; but he had seen that Morrison was really ill-at-ease and troubled, in spite of his chattering, and he himself was not free from anxiety. He had grown very fond of the alert curate, who had done much good work without parading his own virtues or others' vices. He remembered that Balding had spoken of a recent

change in him, of a "melancholy paleness" and signs of worry. He would be sorry indeed if his friend had discovered any signs of serious organic weakness.

"Sit down," he said. "Now, old man, what's the trouble?"

"Well," said Morrison, "I want to ask you, in the first place, whether a man can reasonably be considered responsible for his grandmother?"

"That depends, I think," Ward answered gravely, "upon whether his grandmother was reasonably responsible for him."

Morrison nodded. "Excellently, lucidly and eugenically put. I will go a step further. What has modern science to say about" — he hesitated almost imperceptibly — "epilepsy?"

"Quite a lot," Ward replied. He waved his hand toward his book-shelves. "I have there three volumes, fat and well-nourished, devoted exclusively to that fascinating subject. They are at your disposal at any time when you feel that you would like a little light reading."

"It is generally understood to be hereditary," Morrison said, ignoring the invitation; "to pass through the different generations of a family. Is that so, without doubt?"

"Let us get this case clearly," Ward said. "I gather that you have a strong desire — a yearning — to cultivate epilepsy as an amusement, and be-

fore yielding to that craving, you wish, as a thoughtful and considerate man, to know whether your poor old grandmother is likely to be affected?"

Morrison smiled. "My grandmother died during an epileptic seizure," he said quietly. "Curiously, no other member of my family has suffered in a similar way. We appeared to be immune. But —" He stopped and looked at Ward. Involuntarily, he smiled again. It was a mere nervous reaction. "I rather fancied," he continued after a moment, "that I have inherited the taint."

"Why?" Ward asked curtly.

"I have had two attacks;" Morrison said.

"When?"

"One, almost immediately after you went away, and the other, about a fortnight ago."

"Did you see Lyster?"

"Well," Morrison said, "you 'll think me cowardly and silly, but — I did n't like to. I expect I was afraid of having my fears confirmed. But when you came back — I have been thinking the matter over, you see, and I realized that it was my duty to consult you."

"I 'm glad you found a little commonsense somewhere," Ward said. "Now tell me exactly all you can remember about those attacks. We 'll have the last one first; you may remember the details more clearly."

"I'm afraid my recollections are very vague," Morrison said. "I was in my study, fortunately — "

"At night? "

"Yes."

"What time? "

"I really could not tell you."

"Was it late? After ten? After eleven? "

"I suppose it must have been after eleven."

"Was it after twelve? " Ward persisted.

"Perhaps," the curate admitted. "Yes. I think so. You see, I had been reading and — thinking, and I had risen to get another volume from my bookcase when — well, I just fell, you see. I don't remember anything more until I came round again."

"Nobody found you or helped you? " Ward asked. "You just lay there till you recovered consciousness? "

"Yes. I could n't help that, you know; nor could anybody else. They were all in bed, and I was n't — "

"Unfortunately," Ward said. "You had been out a great deal during the day, no doubt; visiting and so on? "

"A little more than usual, perhaps."

"And it was a hot day? "

"Yes, I think it had been rather warm," Morrison agreed.

Ward gazed at him curiously. "Why did you

think of epilepsy more than of anything else?" he asked.

The curate shrugged his shoulders. "My grandmother —" he began.

"Who possibly was never an epileptic at all," Ward interrupted. "I daresay she had an apoplectic stroke, and nothing else; and a lot of silly people magnified this into lifelong epilepsy. But you have been brooding, and frightening yourself —"

"No," Morrison said, flushing a little. "I assure you I had not thought about the matter for many years, until my own attacks naturally made me connect the two cases."

"Do you know anything at all about epilepsy, except mere guesswork?" Ward asked.

"Not much," Morrison admitted. "I have avoided the subject precisely for the reason that you have just suggested: I did not wish to allow myself to become suspicious or morbid. Of course, I have the usual general idea. Nothing more."

"You could n't very well have much less," Ward said. "Now, if you 'll take off your coat and waistcoat, and try not to imagine that you 're having your photograph taken, I 'll give you a proper examination — which you might have had a month ago from Lyster, if you 'd had enough commonsense to speak to him."

"Am I to look pleasant?" Morrison asked. "Or may I scowl?"

"Just be normal," Ward retorted. "I can stand it."

Very carefully, he proceeded to test the curate's construction and constitution. As he did so, his face, usually impassive when he was occupied with his work, seemed to grow almost harsh.

"Well?" Morrison asked, at last.

"No," Ward replied coldly. "Ill."

Morrison smiled. His sunny disposition, obscured for a moment by anxiety, became serene again when doubt was ended.

"All right," he said. "Of course, I mean all wrong, but *that* 's all right, so long as you know. It 's not being quite sure that plays tricks with one's nerves. I can now put my house in order, turn all responsibility over to you, and be as happy as the day is long." He walked to the window and looked out at the light. He was still smiling. After a little while, his lips moved, and he seemed to be repeating something, but Ward caught only the word "evensong." He turned again. "Thank God," he said.

"For what?" Ward asked.

"I was thinking," Morrison explained. "Just thinking. Did I speak? What did I say?"

"You said 'thank God,'" Ward answered. "And I asked you, for what?"

"For everything," the curate said. "Surely? It would be rather disgusting, would n't it, that I should preach patience and trust in God's love, through the years, and then be impatient, and doubt His love, at the first personal trial!" He sat down. "Just two questions, old man. In the first place, an epileptic, of course, has not a shadow of right to marry?"

"No," Ward said. "Decidedly, an epileptic should not marry."

"In the second place," Morrison continued, "before you give me your instructions, your abominable medicine, and your invaluable advice, I should like to know whether it will hurt me if I still yield to my craving for black-currant lozenges?"

"They will undoubtedly be fatal," Ward returned, "if you take them in sufficient quantities."

Morrison sighed. "The last straw," he said. "The final crusher. I am now abject. I crawl. What is life without lozenges?"

As Ward looked at his friend, jesting, that tragedy might seem less sombre, he considered the serious question that had been asked — whether it were conceivably right for an epileptic to marry? Was that merely a vague enquiry or was there some specific reason for it? He remembered little incidents — trivial, perhaps, but indicative — which had caused him to wonder whether the curate had more than a clerical interest in Alice Heath. Moved

by a desire, cruel but imperative, to probe into the emotions of this gentle, upright man, to compare his attitude with his own and test his power of renunciation, he asked him a direct question.

"Why did you enquire about an epileptic marrying?" he said.

"I wanted to be quite sure," Morrison answered. "Of course, I knew. But — " He shrugged his shoulders. "You see," he added quietly, "I had been foolish enough to fall in love — though it seemed wise enough, God knows, at first."

"Had you spoken to her?" Ward asked.

"Not definitely," the curate said. "But I think she understood. I am afraid she understood. That is the one hard thing, old man: that she must suffer too. Of course, I — after my first attack, I tried to keep out of her way, and to be — you know — colder and more formal, so that she might think it had all been a mistake. But — it makes one feel rather caddish, Ward. Yet I don't know what else to do. If I can just drop out of her life, gradually, she will have a proper chance, you know — the natural elasticity of youth, and all that kind of thing — "

"You are prepared to give her up, then?" Ward asked.

Morrison flushed. "The children of the woman I love shall be healthy, please God; not tainted and doomed," he said. "I hope that she will learn

to forget me. I hope that she will marry, in good time, a man who is worthy of her, and loves her: a man who has the right to love her: a happier man than I."

"Ah, to be able to choose like that," Ward murmured. "Without doubt or hesitation. Just to choose the right, because it is right."

"I beg your pardon?" Morrison said.

"I was thinking," Ward answered; "as you were a little while ago." He put his hand on Morrison's shoulder. "Why be in such a hurry to give her up?" he said. "Why not wait until you find out whether she wants to give *you* up?"

"I don't understand you," Morrison said coldly. "I cannot marry her. Why prolong doubt, uneasiness, perhaps distress?"

"But why cannot you marry her?" Ward asked.

Morrison looked at him in astonishment. "You yourself said that an epileptic had no right to marry."

Ward nodded. "Quite so. But I did n't say that you had n't."

"I don't understand you," Morrison said. "What are you driving at?"

"I was wondering," Ward answered, "why you persist in regarding yourself as an epileptic?"

"Old man," Morrison said, "tell me — did n't you say — ?"

"I said you were ill. And so you are. But I

did n't say you were epileptic. You just let your preconceived ideas run away with you, and I allowed you to ramble on because you deserved some punishment for not coming sensibly to Lyster in the first place. You would have saved yourself a month's unhappiness and mental torture. What is really the matter with you, Morrison, is simply this: you 've been under-feeding, under-sleeping, and over-working; you 've brought on a state of nervous and physical weakness, and you 've had two fainting attacks. What you want is a quiet holiday, a rational life, plenty of sleep, sufficient food, and no worry, and you 'll be as fit as any man has a right to be, in a few weeks. Organically, you 're as sound as a bell."

"Is this possible?" Morrison said. He stood up. "I 'll have to go home and think this over. I — you won't consider me greedy, old man, will you, if I ask you for a few more of those lozenges? I —" His lips twitched. "Thank God!" he whispered.

CHAPTER III

THE branch line that used to link the scattered towns and villages of the Smokeries, now passes merely from point to point of an almost continuous hive. For the separate units, expanding, have added ring to ring, joining neighbour to neighbour and building up, as London was built, a town of many towns, which, growing still, shall become a complex city, clinging to the last to its canopy of smoke, its sentinel-beacons of furnace fires. But the process of cohesion is not yet complete. On the outskirts, there are still villages unabsorbed, isolated hamlets, and townships contentedly independent.

Newchurch is remote from the real pyrexia of the district. Its little railway station, huddled in a dingy valley, is comparatively quiet: the succession of trains which serves the subdued wanderlust of the other towns is checked, and swung round on the return journey, before reaching it. Only a few trains continue to the end of the loop connecting the more distant villages with the terminus, where the London expresses and the main line traffic converge.

On a hot afternoon, when the air was oppressively humid, the one Newchurch porter who was on duty came slowly from the little room, dark and oily, labelled "Porters Only." The warning whistle of an approaching train had roused him from dull stupor: in the glare of the sunlight, he blinked, resentfully.

The train clattered into the station, fuming steam and tawny smoke. A few people descended. The porter, placing himself at the far end of the platform, slammed the swinging doors as the train snorted out again; then, turning, he took the tickets of those who wished to pass through the barred exit. Perceiving a beckoning finger — an imperative finger — he sauntered forward. Suddenly, he became alert. The finger, he realized, belonged to Philpotts, Lord Daventry's indispensable and silent minister. Standing slightly back, was Lord Daventry himself, aquiline, unruffled, imposing.

The porter saluted. As he did so, he became aware of a third person, stalwart and impressive. The multitude astounded him.

Philpotts, without speaking, pointed to a trunk and a bag.

The porter nodded. "Yessir," he said. "Immediately. At once."

Lord Daventry was regarding the third person.

"Where," he asked himself, "have I seen that face?"

The third person was regarding Lord Daventry.

"Where," he wondered, "have I seen that nose, those green-grey eyes, those thin lips?"

Philpotts, having arranged, with a gesture, for the delivery of the luggage, glanced at his master. Obediently, Lord Daventry moved on. Respectfully, Philpotts attended him. The porter, saluting again, thought that this lordship was less active than on the occasion of his former visit. He walked stiffly, and stooped a little.

"'E 's showin' 'is age," the railway man reflected. "'E 's crumblin'. Wot a pity!"

He turned to the third person, a man of about forty-five, big, blond and broad-shouldered, with a tanned face, a moustache that looked light in the sunshine, and a bag that looked heavy. His clothes, though well-made, were obviously not of English cut. Even his soft felt hat was able to announce that it had not been bought in London.

He pointed to his bag. "I want you to send that up to the vicarage," he said.

"Yessir," said the porter. Mentally, he added to his weekly wages the half-crown that he would possibly receive for the trip to the vicarage and the half-crown that he would certainly receive from Philpotts. The total seemed lavish. Suddenly, it diminished, as he connected the large man before him with a small pony trap in the lane outside.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said. "But was you ex-

pected at the vicarage? Timmins, 'e 's bin down with the pony trap most all day, an' yesterday too. 'E said they was lookin' for someone, an' did n't know wot train 'e was comin' by; so 'im an' the vicar, they just settled to meet 'em all. 'E would n't name no names, Timmins would n't: 'e was n't never a talker. But 'e 's waitin' now, back of the 'edge. I 'm doubtin' 'e 's asleep, though. 'E 's that old, you see."

"All right," the big man said. "He can take me up. Just bring the bag along and put it in the trap."

They passed out into the lane. A little beyond the curve, where two trees formed an oasis of shade, they perceived the carriage. The diminutive pony was browsing on the short grass by the side of the path. In the neat carriage sat a white-haired old man. The reins drooped slackly from one limp hand. His head hung forward. He was asleep.

The big man turned to the porter. "Gently," he said, in a low voice. "Don't disturb him. Here, give me the bag."

He put it in the carriage, tipped the porter, and waved him away. That astonished man — in his hand the half-crown of which he had dreamed for a moment, until it seemed to elude him irrevocably — saluted to the measure of such munificence, and returned slowly to his oily den.

The visitor looked for a moment at the white-

haired servant; then touched him lightly on the shoulder.

The old man raised his head. As he saw who had wakened him, the reins slipped from his fingers. Picking them up again, he opened the door and let it swing back.

"Get in, Mr. Harold," he said. "We 've bin expectin' you any time these two days. An' now you 're here. Well, well, I 'm mighty glad you 've come." He looked wistfully at the bronzed face. "An' I was dozin' when you come. Dozin', I was. I 've met all the trains an' looked out for you, I have, watchin' every face as it come round the corner, to see if 't was yourn. An' it was n't. An' now, when it was, I was dozin'. Eh, but I 'm one of the foolish virgins, Mr. Harold; I 'm one of the foolish virgins."

Harold Thorpe got in. "I 'm glad to see you again, Timmins," he said, placing his hand on the old man's arm.

"I had n't ought to have bin asleep," Timmins went on. "But what with gardenin', an' lookin' after the pony, an' them dratted chickens, my old eyes get all of a blur. All of a blur, they get. But I had n't ought to have bin asleep, just when you come. I 'd ought to have known that 's how it would be, an' not let it."

Thorpe took the reins. "How 's the vicar?" he asked.

The old man shook his head. "I could n't tell you, Mr. Harold. What with my eyes bein' all of a blur, with them dratted chickens an' things, I don't seem to see plain. But he 's gettin' mortal old, like me. He won't be asleep, though, the vicar won't. You 'll find him waitin' for you. It is n't every day, Mr. Harold, that an old man's son comes home at last, like Solomon in all his glory. — They 're tellin' me you 're rich now," he added. "Flocks an' herds, an' silver an' gold."

Thorpe laughed. "How did you manage to recognize me, Timmins, if you cannot see the dear old governor clearly enough to know how he looks?"

"I 'd bin sleepin'," the old man answered. "An' dreamin'. An' my eyes was n't all of a blur. But I had n't ought to have bin asleep, Mr. Harold, an' I 'd take it kindly if you would n't mention it to the vicar."

He looked deprecatingly at his master's son.

"Don't worry," Thorpe said. "I have n't come all the way from Colorado to grumble at my friends."

"No, nor to find them asleep, neither," the old man said. "You was expectin' a welcome."

"I 'm going to get it," Thorpe answered. In his eyes was the humility of the returned wanderer, who sees his home after many years.

Lord Daventry, labouring up the hill that led to his grandson's house, deliberately considered the

face of the man he had met at the station, and tried to revive the associations which would have accompanied full recognition. Suddenly, he uttered an exclamation.

"He has shaved!" he said. "Philpotts, he has shaved!"

Philpotts made no remarks. Shaving was legitimate and desirable. Comment was therefore unnecessary.

"Yes," Lord Daventry said. "When I saw him before, he had a beard. Now, he has only a moustache. But it is he, undoubtedly. Philpotts, I was beginning to fear that I was growing old, that my power of recollection was failing. I was mistaken. It is his beard, not my memory, that has vanished. One could scarcely be expected to recognize hairy Esau in the disguise of smooth Jacob. Eh?"

Philpotts inclined his head.

When they reached the house, Miss Sands, suspecting acid in Lord Daventry's perfectly alkaline greeting, was at once disquieted. Dr. Ward, she said, was not at home, and would certainly not be back for dinner. He had gone to a meeting in the principal town of the Smokeries, and was not expected to return till late.

"A meeting, no doubt, in connection with the church?" Lord Daventry sneered.

Miss Sands flushed a little. "They 've had trouble at the pits," she said. "There 's been some

rioting here and there, and it looks like spreading. So the owners are holding a meeting, and the men too."

"Dr. Ward is not a colliery proprietor," Lord Daventry observed, "or a hewer of coal. What on earth has he to do with the meeting? Eh?"

"He knows the temper of the men about here," Miss Sands explained. "So he 's gone to do what he can to bring about an agreement. You see, Lord Daventry, our people are so poor, and a strike or a lock-out means so much misery and seems so pitiful. That is why Dr. Ward did not sit down and say he had nothing to do with the matter. He went out to see if he could help."

"Truly saint-like," Lord Daventry said. "May I ask what the trouble is about?"

"It 's about snapping," Miss Sands answered promptly. Confident that Lord Daventry did not understand the meaning of the term, she waited, with a sense of superiority, to be asked to explain it.

Lord Daventry regarded her composedly. "Really?" he said. "An admirable bone of contention. But labour disputes bore me. They are so distressingly monotonous."

"So is starvation," Miss Sands returned. She was astonished at her own temerity.

Lord Daventry shrugged his shoulders. "Possibly," he said. "But I have not yet studied that question practically. It would be mere affectation

for even a member of the House of Lords to starve, at present. I have little doubt, however, that it will soon become a habit. I assure you, I look forward to each Budget with painful apprehension that the worst is not yet over. And it never is. Budgets are more demoralizing than drugs. The more you take, the more you want. Only the evil ingenuity of a budget-friend would fine a man outrageously for being so considerate as to die. Eh?"

Miss Sands, listening, looked at the lined, expressive face. His eyes, she thought, seemed weary. She realized that he was very old.

"I will fetch you a cup of tea," she said. "It will refresh you after your long journey."

He smiled. "An old man should always be prepared for a long journey," he said.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Ward came down in the morning, his grandfather, serene and satirical, was already up. It was a day of sunshine and blue skies; warm, but not enervating. The air seemed to hold in solution some agent of vitalizing keenness. Even the inevitable film of smoke was faint and translucent.

"I trust," Lord Daventry said, "that your efforts in the cause of peace were successful. It is a pity to waste such enthusiasm. And by the way, what is 'snapping'?"

"Eating," Ward explained. "The miners are allowed half an hour for a meal. There have been disputes about it ever since the Eight Hours Bill was passed."

"And the latest disagreement is ended?" Lord Daventry asked. "Your eloquence has oiled the ruffled billows?"

"I don't know," Ward said. "I'm afraid there may be more trouble. But it is smoothed over for the present, in this neighbourhood, at least."

They went in to breakfast.

"You have not asked me," Lord Daventry observed, "the reason for this hurried visit."

"No," Ward answered. "If you have come for a special purpose, you will tell me, I presume. If you have come merely to re-inspect the pig-sties and criticise the district generally, Marple shall be at your service whenever I am busy. In any event, you know that I am always glad to see you."

"I believe you are," the old man said. "Heaven knows why. But I will tell you the reason for this intrusion. Curiosity. I have not come to argue with you, or to appeal to you. I have come to watch the entertainment and amuse myself with the spectacle of a strong-willed man, of saintly habits, crawling in the mud at the whim of a sensual woman."

"That would certainly amuse you," Ward rejoined. "But why have you come here? No entertainment of that kind has been advertised."

"I have followed the lady," Lord Daventry said. "Cherchez la femme. It is a wise saying. For where the woman is, there also will be the devil — or the devil to pay. Eh?"

Ward's look of enquiry perplexed him. He reflected for a moment.

"You did not know," he said, "that Lady Winter, after leaving Daventry, came straight to her sister here?"

"When?" Ward asked.

"Two days ago. You have not heard from her?"

Ward did not answer, and the old man went

on. "You soon will, then. I assure you, she has come here deliberately to continue the game which you both found so enjoyable at Daventry. She is a woman of singular character, John; a dangerous and delightful woman; very persistent in pursuit, very selfish, and quite without conscience: in fact, truly modern. But you must not let me interfere with your pleasant comedy. If you desire to damn yourself, you could not select a more charming companion — or one with wider and more helpful experience, probably."

"Do you know anything about this 'experience,'" Ward enquired, "or are you drawing conclusions from the one casual glimpse in New York that you told me about?"

"I am drawing conclusions from my own rather extensive experience of the sex," Lord Daventry said. "I am usually considered a good judge of women."

"Of superficialities," Ward said coldly. After a pause, he added: "I am sorry you should couple Lady Winter's name with mine."

The old man sneered openly. "Bah!" he said. "Why this pretence? Do you think you have escaped, that the danger is over? Eh? It is only just commencing. This is not an ordinary woman. I will do her the justice to say that she is not even extraordinary. She is herself. I cannot help wishing that I had been able to meet her in my own

unregenerate days. As for you, my dear Saint John, what can you do? You want her. She wants you. I should have more confidence even in — " He paused and shrugged his shoulders — " George. He is too asinine to appreciate the charms of subtle deviltry. But you are more seducible. Your saintliness will only lead you into a wanton's arms."

" Shall I ring for some more coffee? " Ward asked.

" Before you call in the admirable Sands," Lord Daventry said, " let me mention a peculiar coincidence. You remember, evidently, the little story I told you about meeting Lady Winter and her husband in New York." He paused, half closing his eyes, as if visualizing the scene more completely. " It is odd," he continued, " that while the wife is so affectionately visiting her sister in this inviting neighbourhood, the husband should also be paying a visit to someone. At least, I presume so. I saw him at the station yesterday, when I arrived. He had a portmanteau with him. Interesting, eh? "

" You are quite sure? " Ward asked.

" Quite," the old man affirmed. " He has discarded his beard since I last saw him, but his identity is unmistakable. — Really," he added, " it was very thoughtful of him to come. Everything is now ready for the comedy to proceed. We have the wilful wife, the ardent lover, and the stern, sad husband: the usual and universal three. Eh? "

Ward rose. "There will be no comedy," he said coldly.

"Take care," Lord Daventry rejoined, "that there is not a tragedy instead. I distrust a coincidence — when it takes the form of a husband."

Ward went into his study. He looked at his letters. Amongst them was one from Lady Winter. It was the first she had written to him. Indeed, he did not know, until he had opened it, that it came from her, for he had never seen her handwriting. He considered it now, carefully. Each of the characters was formed distinctly, with a thick, even stroke or curve. The rounded script — smooth but heavy — astonished him. The black ink seemed to form raised letters, moulded from jet and fastened separately to the ivory paper. He had expected angularity, lightness and a flowing style. Yet, as the written lines impressed themselves upon him, he realized that his first vague idea had been wrong. Her personality was in these supple outlines. He began to image her in black velvet, framing the whiteness of her throat —

The letter was short. It was undated. No address was given, and no prefix used. He read it slowly.

"I came back yesterday, and shall stay here for a week. Will you see me, once?

"You will be glad to know that my sister is

almost happy. Mr. Harrington seems wonderfully changed. He is quite gentle and thoughtful. I tell you this because it is through you that it has happened. Do you remember that strange meeting, when you found my pencil?"

That was all. He put the letter in his pocket, glanced through the rest of his correspondence, and went into the surgery.

He did not meet his grandfather again until lunch. The old man seemed wayward, passing from benignity to petulance, and from petulance to unusually bitter criticism. He was evidently in a state of nervous unrest. Ward had never known him to be so variable, and he was glad when the meal was over. Lord Daventry, after a brief rest, borrowed Marple and the car, and went out, as he said unkindly, to breathe the fresh smoke. A little later, Morrison called.

"I have heard," he said, "that that formidable person, your grandfather, has returned to our hospitable shores — forgive the phrase, but I often think of the Smokeries as an island surrounded by fresh air. As I leave to-morrow to commence the frightful task of idleness to which you have doomed me, I thought it would cheer the dear old man up if I presented myself for his benediction. He will be delighted, I know, to see the last of me."

Ward explained that Lord Daventry was then inspecting the atmosphere.

The curate was disappointed. "I may not have another opportunity," he said. "I should have liked to see him. His cynicship has captured my heart — or, at least, a portion of the portion that I reserve for the convenience of my friends. A man who is in love has to limit his — shall we say, cardiac generosity?" He patted Ward's arm. "You unemotional people cannot understand the charm of being quite young, and foolish, and superbly wise. Of course, many people who are in love are merely idiotic. They believe they have achieved something which nobody else has ever really understood. I have met men who raved about the unparalleled paragons they were going to marry, and who evidently pitied the remainder of the universe, shut out from the one amazing and only desirable girl. That kind of thing is irritating. I have no sympathy with it. But I don't mind confiding to you, in strict confidence, that if you want to see a girl who is absolutely, utterly and transcendently peerless, you must let me introduce you to the future Mrs. Morrison. Far be it from me to boast. I am simply stating in the most laconic language possible a fact which would be obvious even to the meanest intellect. Much more, then, O my Daniel, will it be plain to your perspicacity." He grinned.

"You mean Alice Heath, without doubt?" Ward said gravely.

"It is impossible for perfection to remain anonymous," the curate answered.

"There seems to be an epidemic of engagements," Ward said. "There is yourself; there is Lydia Heath — your future sister-in-law — and Harry Poole; I rather suspect that Miss Sands is going to desert me in order to save Balding from dyspepsia and a shattered heart; and Marple, whom I considered impregnable, asked me yesterday if I could increase his wages, as the date for the fatal ceremony had been fixed."

"It is a wonderful world," Morrison said. "Think of so many people walking hand in hand with happiness, their lives transfigured, their thoughts beautiful, and spring in their hearts. — And by the way," he added, "I was at Clayfield the other evening. Harrington seems very different. He 's given up drinking. All his flabbiness has gone. His face is firm, his eyes are clear, and he 's in first rate condition. He looks more like he must have done when he was a young man. I can understand now what always puzzled me before — how his wife could ever have fallen in love with him. Mrs. Harrington looked happier, I thought, though she will never get over poor Walter's death. But she 's closer to her husband than she has been for years. Their marriage seemed a ghastly failure,

did n't it? Now, it makes you feel strange to see them together. There is something wistful and yet so human about it all. — A broken and a contrite heart — you can find both in that house, Ward." He jumped up, suddenly. "I nearly forgot to tell you!" he cried. "Did you know that Harold Thorpe had come home again?"

"I knew he was expected," Ward said quietly. "And so he 's really here at last? Dear old vicar! It will mean a great deal to him."

"Yes," Morrison agreed. "But I 'm afraid the vicar 's not quite what he used to be. He 's an old man, and he shows it. He 's seemed a trifle odd at times, too. Harold's appearance will do him a lot of good, though. The fatted chickens have already been killed, and two blameless ducks are doomed to-day. These auspicious arrivals are rough on poultry. There 's quaking in the fowl-house and quacking on the pond, just at present. It 's a sad outlook for anything with feathers and domestic habits when a wanderer returns to the rural home of his fathers — in this instance, to be precise, of his father; singular, but sufficient; alone, but affectionate."

"When did Harold come?" Ward asked.

"Yesterday," the curate answered. "The venerable Timmins met him and brought him up in triumph. A case of patience rewarded. All things come to those who wait, and some things come to

those who go to meet them. Timmins did both. He went, and he waited. I believe he went fifteen times and waited for the greater part of two days, with the evenings attached. A very faithful man, Timmins, but inclined to doze. I watched him the other afternoon working in the garden. He watered a gravelled path conscientiously for half an hour, till the hose slipped from his fingers and played Niagara with his legs. That woke him up. The ducks were delighted; thought he was making a swagger pond for them. Well, I will wander on. You 'll be coming up pretty soon to see Harold, I suppose?"

"I think so," Ward said slowly. "Yes." His eyes hurt him. "Very soon," he added.

"The vicar would be glad if you 'd drop in any evening, I know," the curate said; "but he will probably send you a formal invitation, as Lord Daventry is here. Curious bit of news that you told me, by the way, about Miss Sands and Balding. I had n't expected anything like that. Their temperaments seemed too distinctly different."

"I thought we had learnt to expect only the unexpected?" Ward said.

Morrison glanced at him oddly. "That seems a trifle peculiar, from you," he remarked. "Miss Sands has given me the impression that nothing which happens is ever unexpected, so far as you are

concerned. She credits you with amazing foresight — in fact, a very creepy gift of prophecy."

"I am afraid," Ward replied, "that Miss Sands has some of the qualities of a magnifying glass." As he spoke the air seemed suddenly to become dark; the chill of night was in it. The room faded, and he saw a man running, running —

"What 's the matter?" Morrison asked sharply.

Ward shut his eyes, with a sense of strain, and opened them again. "I felt cold for a moment," he said quietly.

The curate was concerned. "You 're not going to be ill, I hope?" he asked. "You must look after yourself, old man. Why don't you take one of your own prescriptions, if you 're feverish?"

Ward smiled. "'Physician, heal thyself,'" he said. "But I 'm not feverish, Morrison. It was only a little chill."

CHAPTER V

LORD DAVENTRY was very quiet in the evening, and soon after nine o'clock he committed himself to Philpotts' care and retired to his own room. Ward, left alone, was vaguely restless. He began to read a new novel by a local author of distinction, but the utter saneness of the story wearied him in his unusual mood. He picked up instead a volume of Ibsen's plays, and turned to "Ghosts." His attention still wandered. He compared the realism of the novelist with the realism of the Norwegian: there was something surgical in both. Dismissing details, he considered the gloomy tragedy of Oswald and Regina. It seemed to him that Ibsen was essentially sentimental in his sombreness. This would account for the peculiar vividness of his work. It was theatric, as nature is theatric. And Ibsen was a poet. He could therefore comprehend nature, which is imaginative, rather than mechanical.

He went to his bookcase, took out his copy of Shelley, and turned to "The Cenci." He read only a few passages, and put the book back. But the appeal of the tragic continued to haunt him. He

pictured Oswald in the grip of destiny, doomed, unsavable. The beautiful face of Beatrice appeared: he could not comprehend the expression in the eyes, yet his own imagination had produced it.

He thought of Lady Winter. Her letter was still in his pocket. Its mere existence seemed to diffuse sensuousness. Even the perfume which she used, flooded the air, heavily. He knew that this was an hallucination. When she herself was present, the perfume was almost imperceptible. She did not saturate herself with scent, to drown her personality. She conveyed the impression merely that she had been walking in a garden, where violets grew.

He recalled her violet eyes, her voice, her wonderful physical beauty. Surely it was a form of genius to reveal such loveliness of form.

With an effort of will, he dismissed the images, and began to consider the return of Harold Thorpe, in conjunction with Lord Daventry's recognition, at the station, of Lady Winter's husband. The coincidence was significant.

He looked at his watch. It was nearly eleven o'clock. He walked to the window, twisted a slat of the Venetian blinds and peered through the narrow opening. The night was dark. On the crest of the hill, he could see the lights of the Chayle colliery. But the structure supporting the huge winding wheel was blotted by the shadows. He

thought of the men working in the subterranean gloom. The labour of the world seemed a savage, godlike force; insatiable, pitiless; tearing down, destroying, uprearing, creating; a unity; power, surging or convulsive, sweeping upon the shores of time, and leaving memorials in the sand.

He turned away. It was bed-time, and he felt tired. Yet his restlessness increased. He was affected by the nearness of the woman he had loved; by her letter to him; by his grandfather's sudden visit and sarcastic comments; even by Harold Thorpe's arrival. But some other influence, apart from the happenings of the day, was also swaying him, urging him to action. He had a sense of threatened catastrophe, which must be averted. But his inspiration was vague. He felt, but did not comprehend.

Morrison? Why was he thinking about Morrison? The little curate was going away for a holiday. He would come back perfectly healthy and happy. He would marry Alice Heath and live the life of a normal man; untortured by self-reproaches; serene with the consciousness of duty done, of help given.

He closed his eyes, waiting. In the darkness, a picture gradually developed. He saw a man running, running —

All hesitation left him. He walked into the hall, picked up a cap and a stick, unlocked the front

door quietly, and went out. As he descended the old stone steps, he looked again at the lights of the colliery. Noises came to him, dimly. Men were working on the surface, as well as beneath.

He opened the great iron gate, and turned to the left. He noticed that the air was chilly, but quite still. The sky was clouded, and moonless.

He walked with long, even strides, not trying to think or to see. Yet he was aware, half unconsciously, of the familiar points that he passed — the occasional cottage, the branching ways, the crude stiles. The darkness was not intense, and he imagined that the clouds were disappearing.

When he came to the commencement of the short field path leading to the vicarage, he paused for a moment. The two withered trees that marked the turning seemed like grotesque gargoyles on the roof of the underworld. The impression that he was walking above hidden things, rather than beneath the open sky, developed oddly, and remained. The menace of the unseen affected him.

He passed from the lane into the narrow path. There were cattle in the field: their outlines, at a distance, appeared vague, and the idea of ghostly bulk suggested itself. He thought of the kinship of all animate beings, and then of the shambles. The callous cruelty of mankind seemed more revolting than any savagery of beasts.

He had crossed half way when he suddenly bent

his head and peered forward. The vision of a man running recurred, and with it a faint noise of movement. The image became definite, and the sound, though muffled, unmistakable. He heard breathing; recognized the runner; threw out an arresting arm.

"Well?" he said.

The runner stopped, breathing quickly. "My God!" he said. "*You* here!"

It was Morrison.

He touched Ward, with a trembling hand.

"You knew?" he asked. "You were coming?"

"You might almost say, without fear of contradiction, that I have come," Ward rejoined.

"I don't understand it," Morrison said. "I was running to fetch you — and you are here. It — it 's odd."

"Better not wait," Ward said, moving on as he spoke.

The curate turned, walking with short swift steps that kept pace with Ward's longer and more deliberate strides. He jerked out words and sentences as they went. It was evident that he had difficulty in controlling his voice.

"It 's Thorpe," he said. "Harold Thorpe. Dead. Horrible. His poor father. Balding was there. Saw it. I saw it. Ran to fetch you. Why have n't we telephones? Ought to have. A dead man. Could n't reach you. Had to run. Shot. A frightful thing."

Ward did not speak. They came to the vicarage gate and passed through the garden. The door of the house was open. Morrison led the way in. Ward closed the door, noiselessly, and followed Morrison into the vicar's study, on the ground floor. Again he closed the door, noiselessly.

On an old-fashioned, upholstered couch, Harold Thorpe lay, inert, tranquil. It was difficult to realize that he was dead. The vicar was kneeling at the foot of the couch: he seemed to be praying, though his lips did not move. Balding, the churchwarden, stood in the middle of the room: his face no longer looked ruddy, and he was opening and closing his left hand nervously.

Ward bent over the recumbent body and made a brief examination. When he had finished, he turned and looked enquiringly at Balding. The churchwarden continued to open and close his hand.

The vicar rose, slowly. He seemed very old and haggard.

"It was I," he said. "I shot him. Shot him. My son. I cannot tell you how, now. Balding will tell you. I will go to my room, while he tells you. I will go to my room and pray. I do not feel able to listen." He turned, falteringly. Morrison, glancing at Ward, supported the old man and led him from the room.

Ward turned to Balding, when they had gone.

"Better tell me all about it," he said. "Sit down first."

"No," the churchwarden said. "I'd rather stand. I feel restless, in a manner of speaking, and standing 'll ease me. It 's a terrible thing that 's happened, doctor; a sad and terrible thing. Not for a thousand pound — nay, for every pound and every penny I 've got — I would n't have had it happen." He walked toward the couch, but stopped abruptly, his eyes twitching.

"Don't hurry," Ward said, "but don't be too slow."

"It was like this, sir," the churchwarden said. "The vicar, he asked me to dinner to meet Mr. Harold again. I wondered why, but he 'd his own reasons, as it turned out. Very quiet he was at dinner, and so was Mr. Harold, for all the millions of money I 'm told he 's been making. And after dinner, we came in here, sir; the vicar, and Mr. Harold, and Mr. Morrison, and me. It was late; we 'd been sitting in the dining-room a long time, and it seemed to me I ought to be getting home. I said so, but the vicar, he would n't hear of it. 'No,' he said. 'I want you, Balding. I 've something to say before you go, and something to do, perhaps.' And he had. It 's done now, God help us, and can't be undone. We must bow our heads humbly, for well we know that all flesh is as grass, and life but the wind that moves it, in a manner of

speaking. The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away. — But," he added grimly, "He has n't taken away the body, and there 'll be sore trouble, doctor, and shame and sorrow, before it 's in its coffin, and the coffin in the grave, and the dead at rest, so quiet, till the trumpets sound."

"Was there a quarrel?" Ward asked.

The churchwarden shook his head. "This is how it was," he said. "The vicar turned to his son, and 'Harold,' he says, 'I 've something to say to you, and I 'll ask you to listen and think it over very carefully and slowly, before you decide what to answer. And these gentlemen will listen too,' he says, 'and bear witness before God that I have tried to do my duty as His servant, and a shepherd, unworthy as I am, of His sheep.' And he turned to me. 'Balding,' he says, 'I 've asked you to be present because you are a tried friend and a leader in our little community.' Those were his words. 'You have seen the sin,' he says, 'and the scandal, and the sorrow; and you shall know this night that our God is a God of righteousness; and though He will have mercy, and not sacrifice, He will have justice also, and will demand a reckoning from the faithless and worldly.' "

The little churchwarden had raised his voice. His glance fell upon the couch, and he was silent for a moment. Then he continued quietly. "I must n't keep you waiting, doctor; but I want you

to know just how it happened. Well, the vicar turned to his son. 'Harold,' he says, 'you know the affection that I have for you. You know how I have been looking forward to your return since that first letter, many weeks ago, when you told me of your success and your intention to come home. Your welfare is very dear to me: I am proud even of your worldly achievements, of the position you have gained. But there is one thing that is dearer to me than the prosperity of my own son, and that is the will of God, and the salvation of His children, here and hereafter.' — Never," the churchwarden went on, "have I seen the vicar look so noble and so sad. 'Harold,' he says, 'there is a girl in this village who would have been a sweet and God-fearing woman, if her life had not been wrecked for the idle pleasure of a man. — Nay, my son, I know and I understand: nature, and weak will, and selfishness. Yes. But one must pay for these things. There are some women, alas, so inherently vicious that the wickedness of man can taint them no further. But this was a very different case. The girl was a good girl, a bonny girl, and pure in her thoughts. And now, my son, she is a byword in the village, a slattern, a drunkard, a woman without hope, without honour, without decency. I go amongst my people, and in their hearts they say: "Who is this that preaches to us? See what evil his own son has wrought, and

he goes free, without reproach or punishment." It shall no longer be so said, or thought. You have come home, successful, influential. And I say to you, my son, just what God has put into my heart. You have sinned. Atone, so far as you can atone. Not with the careless charity of careless men: you shall not fling a few pounds, or a few hundreds of pounds, to this woman, and count yourself free. What she is, you have made her. What she will be, and shall be, yet, you must make her, too. You took your pleasure when her face was fair and her ways were winsome. Take her now, my son, from the mire; soften her hardened heart; teach her again the meaning of decency, of purity, and of faith. That shall be your punishment. It shall also be your exceeding reward. Will men jeer, do you think, or women sneer? What matter if they do? But they will not. Never will you be so respected as when you have made this woman your wife, and never so happy. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' "

Ward looked at Balding in astonishment, for the little man was acting, not narrating.

" Mr. Harold just stood there," the churchwarden went on, " and looked at his father. For quite a long time he stood there, and never said a word. And at last, 'You mean Nancy?' he asks. 'You

really want me to marry Nancy? You would receive her, as a daughter?' 'Yes,' says the vicar, 'and gladly.' 'I 'm sorry,' says Mr. Harold, 'but I can't marry her.' And he stands looking at the vicar, and the vicar stands looking at him. And then the vicar puts his hand into his pocket — you can imagine, doctor, we 'd no idea what was coming — and he pulls out a revolver, poor old man, and he points it at Mr. Harold. We was afraid to move, for fear he 'd fire it. Mr. Morrison, he tried to say something, but the vicar would n't listen. 'This is between my son, and myself, and God,' he says, and he speaks again to Mr. Harold, who could n't help a smile at the revolver. 'I have prayed,' he says, 'over this matter. It has been with me night and day, night and day. And I say to you, you *shall* marry that woman. Give me your promise now, or in the name of God I will inflict the punishment that is due. For the wages of sin is death.' And Mr. Harold, he looks at his father. He was n't thinking of the revolver, you could tell that: he was thinking of what the vicar 'd said, and the way he 'd said it, like a prophet in Israel. 'Upon my word,' he says, 'I believe I would do it if I could; and I 'm honestly sorry I cannot.' 'And why not?' says the vicar. And Mr. Harold, 'I 'm not free,' he says, quietly. 'I 'm married.' And the vicar gave a sudden start, convulsive like; sure I am that he never meant to do it, but his

finger was on the trigger, and — the bullet went home."

Ward nodded.

"Where are the servants?" he asked. "Do they know anything about what has happened?"

"They don't seem to have heard the shot," Balding answered. "They were upstairs — in bed and asleep, most likely."

"Give me the revolver," Ward said.

Balding handed it to him.

"There 'll be an inquest," the churchwarden said gloomily. "Everything 'll come out in public. And the vicar 'll be arrested, I suppose. Frightful. And I did n't even know he ever had a revolver. It was n't in his nature. Why, he would n't have shot an armed burglar, he would n't, to save his own life. He must have bought the pistol specially, just for this purpose. He 'd been brooding a long time. Poor old man!"

"Don't worry," Ward said quietly. "Harold was not shot."

"What?" cried the churchwarden. "You don't say!" He sat down. "I don't understand," he said. "How *did* he come by his death? Was it the hand of God Almighty Himself?"

"Yes," Ward said. "We give it another name medically, but it comes to the same thing." He had taken the cartridges from the revolver. Mechanically, he put them back.

"But there was the vicar with his pistol!" Balding said. "And then the shot. Sir, if that shot did n't kill Mr. Harold, only God Himself could have done it, at that moment: God or His angel, like the angel with the drawn sword that stood against Balaam."

"Harold has n't a mark on him," Ward said. "These are blank cartridges. Death was due to heart failure — the result of the sudden shock, of course, but led up to by years of self-poisoning with alcohol and nicotine."

"You don't say?" the churchwarden muttered. He was thinking for the moment of his own profitable inn and its staple commodities.

"The simplest thing in the world," Ward said; "and naturally, the most unexpected."

The excitement that had sustained Balding had passed; he seemed, suddenly, nerveless and dispirited. Ideas no longer surged in upon him; he began to grope for them. "I 'm glad for the vicar's sake," he said. "And so Mr. Harold just died of his own self, in a manner of speaking? You would n't have thought it, would you? — the big, strong man that he seemed! Well, I 'm truly glad for the vicar. It 's bad enough for him to lose his son. But would n't it have been terrible if he 'd killed him himself? Poor old man, he thinks he did. I suppose he 'd forgotten about the blank cartridges. P'raps he did n't rightly think about the

matter at all. Poor, poor old man! He 's been so worrited lately he 'd be likely to think anything."

Ward went again to the couch. When he had made his previous examination, he had noticed a little locket attached to the watch-chain. He wished to open it. He did so. Inside was a miniature of a woman's head.

The head was Lady Winter's. He knew now that Harold Thorpe was her husband. He had suspected so as soon as Morrison had told him of Harold's arrival, coinciding with Lord Daventry's recognition of the millionaire he had met in New York. He surveyed with curious interest the body of the man whom she had loved, or imagined she loved. This inert shape had once held magic for her: the arms had enfolded her. Life, for a little while, had been transformed, because of this thing that was dead.

He took out the miniature, put it in his pocket-book, and closed the locket. When he turned round, the vicar and Morrison had re-entered the room.

The old man did not seem to see him. The shock of the catastrophe, and the whole strain of the evening, had been more than he could continue to endure, and he was now in a state of semi-stupor. He looked vacantly at the couch. The sight of his son's body revived for a moment the distress of the tragedy: he tried to speak, but his utterance was disconnected. The curate led him gently to a chair.

Ward explained briefly to Morrison about the

actual cause of death. "It's no good telling the vicar now. He would not comprehend. Please get him to bed, Morrison. He is exhausted and will sleep like a child. Perhaps he will be troublesome in the morning: look after him till I come. Balding, you will go home. I shall lock the door of this room and take the key with me. Harold won't mind dispensing with watchers. He is too big now, or too little, to worry about formalities. I will communicate with the coroner and see if we can't avoid an inquest."

Morrison did not answer. Carefully, he led the vicar from the room. Balding followed. Ward glanced again at the body on the couch. In spite of his medical training and experience, the translation of life into death still perplexed him. Could the dignity of man be other than trivial, when at any one of the moments in his years so small a chance could reduce him to utter silence, conquering his will, shattering his purpose, and delivering him as carrion to the cleansing worms?

There came to him the old, curious feeling of being caught in the toils of a relentless system, which no human effort could modify. The sense of impotence was oppressive. With an almost involuntary gesture of the hand, as in brusque farewell to the dead, he went out and locked the door. It seemed to him that he had been closing doors persistently throughout the evening.

CHAPTER VI

A NEW day had dawned — measured by the symbolism of the clock — when he left the vicarage and turned toward home. As he walked along, the idea of the insignificance of man continued to haunt him. He conceived the universe as a vast, sentient being — a mammoth incredibly extended — of which the worlds and the stars were minute atoms, clustering into cells, and building up the fabric of that monstrous bulk. And these cells were the living tissue of a living organism, subject to the laws that regulate all animate bodies, attracting and repelling, breathing and shuddering, withering and growing, changing and being renewed; existing, achieving; servants and lords of a brain and consciousness transcending the puny imagination of pygmies. And on this gigantesque body, parasites crawled, and died: earth-men and star-men, they struggled, and ceased; their mines were but the scratches of insects, their cities and pyramids the swelling of tiny poisoned wounds.

He came to the path through the fields, which he had traversed so often on his way to the church. The thought of the pilgrimage, with all that it

involved, clung to him, importantly. Surely this imagery of insects and parasites was unjust to a race with such ideals; groping for the divine; stretching out hands in the darkness; dreaming of light. The endurance and mere cleverness of men seemed appalling. Rough, harsh and grotesque when the race was stumbling to a defined form, they had gradually evolved beauty and gentleness. Though savagery and unloveliness lingered, the march toward the goal never ceased. Primeval still in their lusts, in their contempt for the pain of the helpless, they were wonderful in their loves, their self-sacrifice, their achievements of deed and thought. Though the slaughter-house was more sacred than the sanctuary; though the price of blood was quoted daily as an item of business news; though Mammon and Ishtar flaunted their sceptres, and Nazareth was a mere name, Calvary a conundrum, and Christ an outmoded formula: — yet they had conquered the air, harnessed the sea, and chained fire to their chariots. Their empires, rising, decaying, vanishing; their codes and legends; their mutable philosophies; their cities built on the ruins of cities, and creeds on the ruins of creeds; — all were but details in the superb pageant of progress. Æons ago, some swart herald of history dreamed and declaimed the prologue; myriads, dreaming still, were shaping the epilogue, with its immortal disdain of mortality, its demand for God and a purpose.

He had reached the point where he had met Morrison, running in the darkness. His thoughts reverted to the curate, with his simple faith and unswerving regard for duty. A good man, not removed from his fellows by any lack of human emotion and temptation, but living his life in the light of a clear ideal; making the best of the harsher conditions that dismayed the morbid; helping a little where he could; taking joy, when it came to him, gladly; guiding his thoughts to serenity, and looking forward, without fear, to the time of rest. *Διαλάμπει τὸ καλόν.* This was the true beauty and nobility: not in the fever of genius or the fitful splendour of the abnormal; but shining through the steadfastness of a life devoted to the service of God and the ministry of man. For man, however imperfect and undeveloped, must be valued by the standard of the better and the best. In the brutal, the squalid, the repulsive, the incomplete, lurks something, always, of the dignity which has been, and is, and shall be. Collier or potter, ploughman or labourer, the sot must be reckoned with the saint, the clod with the clear-brained, the vicious with the visionary.

He came from the field-path into the lane, and passed the cottage where Lydia and Alice Heath lived. He was glad that they were soon to realize the happiness that was due to them. It seemed impossible for him to think of these girls without

thinking also of the class which they represented: the brave and sincere, who refuse to be disheartened by dreary days or tempted by tawdriness. There was no need to despair when the world could show, not amongst its brilliant and glittering careers, but amongst the obscure and patient, such lives as these, and Morrison's, and so many others, even in that grimy and unleisured district.

As he came within sight of his own house — a darker blur in the shadows — he wondered with what feelings Harold Thorpe had returned to the home where his welcome was to merge so suddenly in tragedy and death. Well, he had gone whither all must follow; a few years more or less — could they matter much? Rather, would it not be better that all should die; that life itself should cease, the pageant fade, and the incredible suffering of the universe be over at last? If only the dream could end, and sleep, untroubled, eternal, erase all consciousness!

Yet his strange previsions had produced in him a personal assurance of the reality beyond the dream. Often the dividing veil, suffused with light, seemed transparent, and his senses would leap almost to partial comprehension. The full meaning and purpose of the universe eluded him still, and would continue, he knew, to elude him: but the belief that a meaning and purpose existed was more than an idea, a hope, a creed. To him, it was a

fact, a part of experience, in no way depending on variable religious feeling.

Though he had identified himself with the Church, as a magnificent agent for good, there had been moments when he wavered in his adherence, when he felt that the world had risen beyond shibboleths and could no longer accept doctrines and dogmas merely because of their value for the multitudes. Yet, perhaps, there was still need, for the people, of temples and of priests; of a system interwoven with daily life and with daily death; with joy and sorrow; with the trivial and large happenings of the noble and ignoble. Better the worshipped images of saints, the circumstance of sacraments and ceremonial, than forgotten saintliness, decayed ideals, and the contemptuous indifference of ignorance. But for those who understood — to whom the concrete was unessential, the abstract intelligible — there was a wider scope of thought, a higher and more humanizing wisdom.

Yet, from time to time, the simple and sufficient teaching of Christ renewed the spell which was never wholly rejected. So many men, convinced and confident, were trying earnestly to revitalize religion: a new spirit, neither sanctimonious nor sombre, was moving them to forsake apathy and pretence. In his normal conduct, Ward identified himself with this ideal of sincerity and service, of faith and faithfulness. But in periods of unrest, the safe-

guard of habit fell from him. Faith seemed so shallow, nature so cruel, God so remote from human comprehension.

Through wavering and disquietude, however, the conviction of a sustaining will inevitably established itself. If life were a dream, it was God's dream. He could no longer explain his own clairvoyance as due to coincidence or imagination. There had been too many warnings — vague or clear, but never incorrect — of happenings to come. Wondering why he was affected in this strange way, he laughed. Was it more mystical than the fashioning of a moth's wing, or the petal of a rose, or the lips of a woman? And there were many moths, many roses, many women.

He had not entered the house when he reached it, but continued to walk by the placid pool outside. He was tired, yet not sleepy. The emotions of the night had produced in him a high degree of sensitiveness. The night itself seemed charged with some peculiar force. Once, he quivered, involuntarily, as at an actual touch of invisible hands. The trees that ringed the pool seemed to lean toward him; the darkness of the sky pressed down and clung about him; the ground uplifted itself —

For a moment, his thoughts concentrated on Lady Winter. With incredible swiftness, he considered the relation of the tragedy to her, and to

himself. Her husband was dead. She was free. She loved him —

He seemed to see Lord Daventry's face, the thin lips curved into a smile, mockery in the eyes —

He closed his own eyes, and at once he saw again a man running, running —

Voices tried to make themselves articulate. Fingers plucked at him, urging him to some required movement. Lights flickered around him, innumerable dots, merging into flashes —

With an effort, he controlled himself. These were mere fictions of hallucination. But there was something beyond; something which he had not yet grasped. As he stood, hesitating, a blaze of light swept through him: in his head, there was a roar, as of flood or fire. The shock startled him. He could scarcely realize that this was within, and not from without; a mere nervous affection.

But he understood that the tragedy to which he had already been called was only the prelude to a larger catastrophe, of which radiations had continued to reach him, until they culminated in this intense shock. With his attention drawn to Morrison and Harold Thorpe, he had ignored the other suggestions. Now, he conceived something menacing and sinister; planned on a vast scale; wolfish for lives —

And suddenly, he turned, and began to run.

Leaping a stile, he crossed the lane, passed through an open gate and steadily mounted the path up the hill. As he ran, the noises of the Chayle colliery, at the top, came to him like echoes of his own thoughts; and he saw, as a man may see in a fantastic, vivid dream, a monstrous Moloch, caged in the gloom of the underworld. He had a sense of tremors, as if that Horror, eager to slake its fiery thirst for blood, were shattering the bonds that barriered it from its victims.

As he came to the summit of the slope and touched the rim of the level ground, the sounds from the colliery were suddenly distinct and objective: lights, dimmed by the slow thinning of the darkness, streamed palely through the windows of the engine-house, or flickered, more redly, on the bank, where men moved and worked. He wondered what their employment was. His ignorance seemed like an accusation. He had lived so near: why did he know so little?

He had been running swiftly, but easily: now, he stopped, hesitated, and then moved toward the engine-house. A figure loomed through the shadows: he was passing, when the glare, as a furnace was opened, made the man clearly visible. It was Poole, the under-manager.

"Good Lord!" he said blankly, recognizing the doctor.

Ward spoke quietly, but there was an inflection

in his voice that made the listener look at him curiously.

"I have no time to explain," he said. "It is a matter of life and death. There is going to be an explosion — a bad explosion. Get up all the men and boys who are in the pit. At once."

"I don't understand," Poole said. "How do you know? You see, I can hardly — "

Ward cut him short. "Don't argue. Fetch them up."

The under-manager was still reluctant. "You 'll have to forgive me, doctor," he said. "But this may be only a wild-goose idea, and I have my position to think of. The night-shift will soon have finished, anyhow. Why not wait till they come up in the ordinary way?"

"Because they never would come up," Ward answered. "Do what I say, man. I will take all responsibility with the directors. For God's sake, hurry." He put his hand on the other's shoulder. "It is n't guesswork," he said. "I know."

Through Lydia Heath, Poole had received a vague impression that Ward was credited with an eerie gift of second-sight. Some compelling influence seemed to flow from him now. The under-manager was affected also by the doctor's position in the district. For Ward's assured social standing and independent income had caused him to be regarded, in spite of his simple habits, as on a higher

plane than an ordinary medical practitioner. His earnestness, and special interest in industrial problems, had enlarged his reputation.

The under-manager wavered. "You mean it?" he asked.

"Do you think I have come at this time to babble folly?" Ward said. He pushed him away, gently. "Go. Men's lives are in your hands. The seconds are hours."

Poole turned, and began to run. Ward scarcely glanced at the receding figure. A curious lethargy descended upon him. The grey night was shut out. He no longer saw the flaring lights in the gloom, or heard the hiss of steam, the rumble of machinery, the straining creak of cables and cages. The external world was blotted in impenetrable darkness, engulfed in dense silence. He could see only within himself. A small globule of fire was balanced between the two hemispheres of his brain. He watched it expanding into a sphere of serene radiance, cool and unquivering. Soon, he saw the face of a woman mirrored in that light: the eyes shone; the lips were red. Gradually, the redness became flame, the loveliness was lost, and the face, swelling hideously, was distorted into a vast, writhing skull. Through the eyeless sockets he saw seething fire, lurid, ravenous, roaring —

He found himself looking at Poole, who had sought him out; spoken to him; shaken him by the

arm. He did not know how long he had stood, alone. He came from his dreaming as from another world.

"Everybody 's up," the under-manager said. "But nothing 's happened. I 'm doubting I 'll get into trouble over this, doctor."

Ward glanced round. There were groups of men, with boys, talking, puzzled; in some cases, sullen. Their voices came to him remotely, dimly.

He shook off the impression of aloofness as if it were an actual weight, and moved nearer to the pit-mouth. He made no reply to Poole, but stood, listening, watching.

The men pointed him out to one another. Following the direction of his gaze, they imitated him, half unconsciously. Those who were near the shaft moved back a little. They were afraid of what might come from that opening into the underworld. Soon, a ring of men, silent, awed, watched and waited.

Suddenly, without warning, there was a deafening explosion, followed almost immediately by another. A tremendous sheet of flame leaped up the shafting, licking greedily at boards and plates —

It died out, as a dream dies.

A strangled sob seemed to come from the throats of the men. Some leaned against their fellows. One fell on his knees and began to pray, audibly.

Then, slowly, they surged round Ward. But the

thing that had happened was too wonderful for them to comprehend. They were afraid, and spoke in whispers.

"He 's saved our lives," they murmured.

"Thank God," said one, old and bent, "that our wives are not widows this grey morn, an' our bairns fatherless!"

Poole had clutched Ward's arm convulsively.

"I thought you were mad!" he said. "I thought you were mad. And they would have died — caged in that hell — " His grasp relaxed. "How did you *know?*" he cried. "Has God made you one of His prophets?"

"I had a presentiment," Ward answered coldly. "I will go home now. I can do no good by staying. What remains is your work." He nodded, and moved away. The men watched him go, in silence. His pallid, composed face impressed them strangely.

As he descended the hill, it occurred to him that these men would perhaps not have been in the pit, but for his own efforts to avert a strike. "I owed them a warning," he thought. "But they will have to die one day — does it matter much when?"

He remembered that many of them had wives and children. And for those who had not — well, it were better to fall in the fulness of time than to be plucked like unripe fruit; better to sleep when they were weary, and the night had come, than to close their eyes in the daylight of their generation,

while the sun made life seem fair and the voices of their comrades called them to new pleasures or unfinished tasks.

Yet it seemed to him that few had tasks which were worth the finishing. The lunatic, the lover and the poet were perhaps justified in clinging to life: the lunatic — the unnormal man — pursuing strange fancies and sometimes achieving strange results; the lover, clothing clay with divinity; and the poet, imprisoning beauty in words, or music, or enduring marble. But perhaps there was something of this trinity — of lunatic, lover and poet — in all men.

Life must certainly be desirable, on the whole, or nature would not have established so strongly the mating and reproductive instincts. How many in his own small circle were giving effect to those instincts! Varying in disposition and gifts, they pressed forward to the same end: Marple, the chauffeur; Morrison, gentleman and gentle humorist; Poole, whom he had just left; Alice and Lydia Heath; Miss Sands, possibly, and Balding, mature, but not unemotional; — even his brother George, and the chorus girl whom he would probably marry.

How instinctive it all was — primeval, unreasoned — in the vast majority of men and women. Blindly, they recognized their need and strained for its fulfilment, afraid of the loneliness of uncompanioned lives.

He had reached the door of his house. He opened it and went in. It was almost daylight.

He walked quietly upstairs, and into his room. His preparations were soon made, and he got into bed.

CHAPTER VII

FOR the first time within Miss Sands' experience, Ward did not come down for breakfast. No one disturbed him. Lord Daventry made one sarcastic comment, and relapsed into silence. When he emerged, Miss Sands had disappeared, and his second effort was wasted. He took refuge in Philpotts, and Philpotts took him into the fresh air and consigned him to the care of Marple. A little run in the machine, he considered, would do his lordship good. Inwardly protesting against being made the recipient of any benefits from anyone, in any way, his lordship meekly assented.

News of the strange events of the night had passed swiftly through the whole neighbourhood, with inevitable exaggeration and distortion. The sudden death of Harold Thorpe was variously attributed to natural, if startling, conditions, such as an apoplectic seizure; to the mania of the girl Nancy, frenzied by her wrongs, her long degradation and her slavery to alcohol; or to a secret emissary of the Black Hand, who had dogged the footsteps of the millionaire from far America and ruthlessly settled some uncomprehended feud. But

no word had leaked out connecting the vicar with his son's death, though many remembered and repeated awesomely the prophecies from the pulpit, the sombre warnings of the wages of sin. Ward's association with the tragedy had been invested with every element of the eerie and mysterious: he had foreseen, foretold; had hastened to prevent the slaying, but had failed by moments.

The greater marvel, however, of the pit-explosion, told and retold by those whose lives had been saved, was the absorbing and epochal theme. Here was no vague, unravelled happening, garbled in report, to be unfolded gradually by the police and the local papers: it was concerned intimately with many households, which had direct evidence and a clear story; it was interwoven with the vital interests and industry of the district, and it lent itself peculiarly to emotional colouring. Legends of the underworld and of elemental forces — legends vague, unfamiliar, obscured by generations of neglect — were dug up from sub-consciousness, pieced together by semi-senile minds. Paganism, with its deities and demigods, spirits of flood and spirits of fire, crept haltingly into the daylight of modernity. But the underlying Methodism of the people became predominant; the exaltation of the old revivalist meetings took possession of them. The glory of God, it was whispered, had been made manifest; a new evangelist had arisen, to scatter the clouds

of materialism and doubt and reveal once more the supremacy of the spiritual, the pervading activity of a beneficent Providence. Something of the fervour that swept the multitudes when the Carpenter of Nazareth healed the maimed and the blind among them, was seen now through the scattered homesteads and villages. Old men remembered the certainty of their childhood, repeated disused sayings from the Scriptures, put on again the manner of the convert, the mantle of the disciple. Women, with the dignified humility of those redeemed from widowhood, gathered in little groups, gossiping, wondering, scanning the fabric of the new miracle.

Marple, the taciturn, had heard rumours, which he was unable to resist transmitting to Lord Daventry, as they drove slowly on the Newchurch road. The old man, unaccustomed to conversation with his chauffeur, was at first negligent and unresponsive, but, as he pieced together the fragments that reached him, his manner changed: he leaned forward, alert, receptive, and finally ordered that the car be stopped, so that he could hear without distraction the whole story. Marple repeated, in short, staccato sentences, all that he had gathered. Lord Daventry listened attentively, but made no comment. When the tale was finished, he told Marple to drive to the vicarage, where he had a brief interview with Morrison, and with the coroner, who had just arrived, and was strolling about very

placidly. Afterwards he visited Balding, who was duly sensible of the honour paid to his little hostelry; and then, after some trouble, hunted down Poole, the under-manager at the Chayle colliery. He returned home, thoughtful, reticent, and with a copy of "The Guardian," the local paper, which had hastily collected all the rumours and the facts, and presented them intelligently in a special edition.

Ward came down for luncheon, offering no excuses for his late appearance. He was astonished at Miss Sands' attitude. She regarded him with timidity, yet her eyes revealed the outreaching of emotion with which sensitive women approach any manifestation of spiritual mysteries. She was herself conscious of this: so, she felt, might that Mary whose brother was raised from the dead, have looked upon the Master at whose feet she sat. Involuntarily, her thoughts passed from her employer to Balding. A faint flush came to her cheeks as she realized that she had really been trying to look upon the churchwarden as a possible suitor. She felt that she had outraged her own womanliness. Measured by the standard of the man before her, the little rotund publican and pillar of the Church became grotesquely impossible. In that instant, Balding's fate was decided, irrevocably, and the housekeeper dedicated herself to her vocation, not less spiritual than practical.

Lord Daventry regarded his grandson moodily.

Once or twice he checked himself when at the point of speech, pressing his lips together and glancing corrosively at Miss Sands. But gradually his expression softened, as if he were putting away perplexities; his lips relaxed, and his face, in repose, seemed less aquiline and haggard. Lunch was almost finished before he permitted himself to speak.

"You slept well?" he asked, slightly stressing the "well."

"Certainly," Ward answered.

"I am glad you found your halo such a comfortable pillow," the old man said.

"I use an ordinary pillow," Ward said.

"But not an ordinary halo," Lord Daventry rejoined. "However, it was fitting that our cherished Saint John should acquire the apostolic nimbus."

"I will assume that your remarks are pleasantly humorous," Ward said. "You don't mind if I fail to understand them?" He turned to Miss Sands, who was withdrawing, with her eyes fixed on the halo. "Will you tell Marple that I shall want him in ten minutes?"

"You had better read the paper before you go out," his grandfather observed, passing "The Guardian" to him.

Ward glanced at it, and began to read. After some time, he pushed the paper away and sat quietly, his head drooping a little. His eyes seemed tired.

"Well?" Lord Daventry asked.

"I don't understand," Ward answered.

"You see what they are saying?"

"Babble does n't count," Ward said. "I 'm not worrying about what sensation-hunters think or say."

"You 've given them something to think about," the old man said.

"To tattle about," Ward answered. "But what does it all mean? Something happened, last night. Things have happened before — heaps of things — little things. Last night, it was a bigger thing — more public. But what does it all mean — the big things and the little things? I 'm an ordinary man. But last night, for instance, something came to me. I don't know what you call it. It just took me, flooded me, swept me on. I was n't guessing. I knew. Knew what was going to happen, as one knows what has happened already. Saw the wall of flame, heard the roar of it. And there have been other things — over and over again — "

"Do you," the old man asked, "always see the future — or do you go back? Do you see things in the past — not the recent past, but long ago; things that have not happened to you, in this life, but may have happened before?"

"Yes, I have gone back," Ward said. "But I could understand that — in part, at least. But the future — "

"The thing has happened before in our family," the old man said. "You know that. Now it has cropped out again. I don't see anything particularly perplexing in it. You 're just a highly sensitized receiver — under certain conditions, anyway. You 're very much en rapport with that curious world beyond the threshold that we 're only beginning to investigate. Imagine the inhabitants of that world, with their freedom and range of motion, their developed intelligence. How often must it happen that they will see conditions that must inevitably produce a certain result? They can probe where we should be blind; they can carry the game of probabilities to a much finer point than we can. Last night, for example, one or some of them discover conditions that make an explosion at the colliery certain. They try to warn us, for they are interested in our world: they have been here. But what can they do? There 's nothing on our side to receive their wireless messages. Sometimes one almost gets across; and we hear about a premonition or a dream. But as a rule the effort is wasted. Here, they find you: there 's something about you — mental or physical, electric or psychic — a little more phosphorus, a little less acid — an extra cell — perhaps a brain convolution — anyway you 're different. They can make you understand. You 're the receiver for their messages."

"That 's pretty much the explanation I had

worked out," Ward said. "And yet — " He stopped, and his eyes seemed to be following some movement. "It 's so far away," he said. "So far ahead. How can they tell years beforehand? "

"They can't," Lord Daventry said. "They can only tell you probabilities. They can reason from cause to effect. But they may make mistakes. They are not infallible."

"Of course," Ward said. "Of course. Probabilities, not inevitabilities, when there 's room for other conditions to creep in." His eyes still followed the movement in the air.

"What are you looking at? " his grandfather asked, watching him.

Ward did not answer. A picture was forming itself before him — a picture that he had seen before, of a woman in a darkened room. With a straining movement of the head, he threw off the obsession, as if it were physical.

"I must go out," he said. "There are several things I should have done — early. It was silly to sleep when the world was wide awake." He moved to the door. "Would you care to come with me? "

"If you are thinking of the coroner and the affair at the vicarage," Lord Daventry said, "you need not bother. I have settled all that — so far as it can be settled at present."

"Thank you," Ward said. "I was wondering why he had n't turned up before now."

"I told him not to disturb you," Lord Daventry said.

Ward glanced at him. He knew that the old man's consideration, curtly expressed, conveyed deep feeling.

"There was a policeman pottering about," Lord Daventry continued. "He had been worrying because he could not get into the room. Morrison said you had the key. So the representative of law and order had forced the catch of the window and climbed in. I sent him away, of course. The coroner had driven over just before I got there. He was not worrying. I have rarely met a more satisfactory nonentity. I told him to keep on not worrying until he heard from you. He seemed quite contented to leave the matter in your hands. Nothing else required attention, so I came back for lunch."

"You have been very busy," Ward said, "and very thoughtful." He placed his hand on the old man's arm, and they went out together.

They drove to the vicarage, which presented an air of dreariness and oppression, as if devitalized by human consciousness of the tragedy that had taken place. It was a windless day, and the stillness of the trees, the utter quietude of the garden, increased the impression of gloom.

Morrison met them and remained with Lord Daventry while Ward went in to look again at the

dead man. He locked the door when he came out, and gave the key to Morrison. Afterwards they all went up to see the vicar, who was sitting in an easy chair in his bedroom. His mind was still not clear. He scarcely noticed the visit; did not speak at all; seemed lethargic, without initiative.

Lord Daventry was glad to get away; even Morrison's chatter — the curate had resumed a little of his customary vivacity — could scarcely penetrate the sombreness in which the whole place was enveloped.

The gate was opened for them by the venerable gardener, Timmins. He too seemed apathetic, stunned by the shock of his young master's death; and he allowed the gate to swing to prematurely, compelling Lord Daventry to move with more celerity than dignity. The ancient gardener slowly realized his fault.

"I 'm sorry, doctor," he said. "I did n't mean for to do it. But my eyes was all of a blur. It 's them dratted chickens an' things; they don't let me see plain. I 'm gettin' mortal old, like the vicar. But Mr. Harold, he won't get old, will he? Cut off in the flower of his youth, God help us all, an' sent to the eternal judgment. An' may God have mercy on his soul. I did n't think, when I went to meet him, an' waited for him them many times, I did n't think it would end like this. An' now he 's sleepin', an' won't never wake this side o'

the judgment day. An' I knowed him when he was a young youth, I did. But we 'll all come to it sooner or later. We 'll all come to it." He shook his head, ominously.

"He was very fond of Harold," Ward said as they drove away. "A dog's affection."

Lord Daventry was thinking of the vicar. "I am sorry Thorpe has given way so completely," he said. "But, of course, at his age —" He shrugged his shoulders. "As for the lugubrious individual who opened the gate for us, for a fleeting instant, he seemed extremely like his own ghost, unvaleted." He relapsed into silence. The words had evoked an image of Philpotts deftly touching up a silent figure, preparing it for its last earthly ceremonial, before the coffin was nailed down and the comedy completed. He resented the melancholy evidence of age obtruded by the vicar and his gardener. For when one's contemporaries are old, one is old also, and it is annoying to be reminded of commonplace platitudes.

Ward commenced his round of professional visits. It was late when they returned home, and dinner was ready.

CHAPTER VIII

"I WONDER," Lord Daventry said, looking at his coffee, "whether Harold Thorpe was married? Perhaps he had a wife who will outwardly mourn, and inwardly rejoice, at this unexpected and permanent separation. Eh? It has occurred to me that Harold's homecoming and the arrival of my friend the millionaire from America may prove to be so closely connected that it would be difficult to separate the two occurrences. Eh?" He lifted his cup, and put it down. Philpotts did not permit him to drink coffee after dinner, but it was the old man's invariable custom to have coffee served and to pretend that he might drink it, if he cared to run the risk of insomnia.

"You are quite right," Ward said. "Harold was your millionaire. When he is buried, you will be able to forget him."

"I never forget," the old man said. "Sometimes I refuse to remember. That is a very different thing. But I should be sorry to imitate the senility of your friend the vicar. I prefer to live with complete consciousness of all that living means, and to die, when I have to die, with complete conscious-

ness of all that dying means. I dislike this modern tendency to shirk realities."

Ward was silent for some time. Life, death, consciousness — the words came strangely to him for the moment, like little lettered labels drifting through a dream, waiting to attach themselves.

"So you think we are shirkers?" he asked, at last.

The old man shrugged his shoulders. "Not wilfully, of course. You don't intend to shirk. You have all sorts of beautiful fads and theories, but you are not willing to make the effort to carry them into practice. You dream of universal peace — and build more Dreadnoughts. You preach Christ — and worship mammon. You pretend to reverence woman — and regard her chiefly as a sex convenience. It is all perfectly natural, and very amusing. But I prefer my own way. I have never cultivated any annoying ideals that might interfere with my simple habits. You, on the other hand, are always trying not to cultivate any habits that might interfere with your irritating theories. I imagine that the effort is sometimes distressing. Eh?" He looked steadily at his grandson.

"I suppose we do shirk," Ward said. "Yes. We talk too much. We don't act. Christ acted. He brought his vision into daily life, though it meant crucifixion. We have n't grit. We tell others what to do — but we shirk doing it ourselves. We

make excuses for ourselves. We see what is going to happen — but we let it happen." He seemed less composed than usual, as if the strain of recent events had overtaxed his reserves of nervous force.

"And you yourself?" Lord Daventry said. "You are prepared just to — let things happen?"

Ward returned his grandfather's gaze. In the old man, he saw embodied a dead generation. Not from him, or from what he represented, could the new generations hope for counsel or comfort in the problems that they themselves had fashioned, as their knowledge widened and their vision seemed clearer, but their heritage of passions still perplexed them. For though the old had their own wisdom and could give affection, open or concealed, they could not give complete comprehension: they were outmoded; they stood on the other side of the gulf of years, which none could cross, hither or thither.

"Let the dead bury their dead," he murmured.

"Eh?" said the old man, slightly disconcerted.

"I beg your pardon," Ward said. "I was thinking aloud: thinking out the answer to your question. No, I am not prepared just to let things happen. I am going my own way."

"I congratulate you," Lord Daventry said. "Of course, I do not know yet what you mean by your own way, but I hope you do not intend that it shall

be littered with petticoats. Petticoats and a halo seem distinctly incongruous."

"That has been the teaching of the past," Ward replied. "Like so many of the teachings of the past, it is absurd, and we are beginning to recognize the absurdity. I am going my own way because I believe it is right. I do not care one iota about the views of the Elizabethan or Victorian era."

"Very well," the old man said. "Very well. I shall await the outcome with considerable curiosity. But I may be permitted to warn you that you must be prepared for certain eventualities — either seductive or disagreeable. I speak, of course, with excessive diffidence, as merely a representative — accidentally unburied — of the Victorian era."

The surgery bell rang.

Ward rose.

"I think I am prepared for most eventualities," he said. "You will excuse me? I will answer that ring myself."

He walked through his consulting room into the surgery, and opened the outer door. He saw two figures. One of them, for a moment, he did not identify. Then he recognized James Harrington. Lady Winter was with her brother-in-law.

He moved to one side, without speaking, and they came in. He closed the door.

In the light of the surgery lamp, Lady Winter looked pale and tired.

"You did not answer my note," she said. "So I have come to my doctor's surgery, like any other patient."

Harrington's eyes were searching Ward's face persistently.

"It 's a strange tale men are telling of you, Dr. Ward," he said.

"In what way?" Ward asked.

"In Christ's way, I 'm thinking," Harrington answered, slowly. "Leastwise, not in any way that ordinary folk are familiar with. 'T will be a long time before people hereabouts forget the story. By all accounts, there are men living this day who should rightly be dead, and boys who 'd never have known what it was to be men, but for you. Sir, you have done a wonderful thing."

Ward made no reply.

"You wished to see me?" he said, to Lady Winter.

"Yes," she answered, looking into his eyes.

He took her into the consulting room. Harrington remained in the surgery.

CHAPTER IX

SHE would not sit down at first, but stood near him, following him, half unconsciously, when he moved away. The action jarred his strained nerves. He moved a chair forward.

"If you will sit down, I shall be able to listen to you. If you insist on standing, please be as brief as possible."

"Nerves out of order?" she asked, settling herself in the chair.

"I am all right," he answered. "It 's the universe that is out of order, for the moment." He laughed, then closed his lips, and waited.

She did not speak for some time, but watched him. Her right hand, resting on the arm of the chair, began to beat a tattoo.

"Please don't," he said, curtly.

"More trouble with the universe?" she asked.

He did not answer.

"You don't ask why I have come to see you," she said, after a little while.

"Why should I ask?" he answered. "You will tell me when it suits you. I can wait. I am not curious."

She looked at him again for some time, as if trying to fathom his mood.

"I came to you," she said, "because you would not come to me. You see, I am a woman."

"I understand," he said.

"I believe you do," she said. "You understand so many things, that you may even understand what a woman never understands: herself. Of course, your grandfather thinks that he understands. He classifies all women as good or bad. He doesn't know any intermediate stage. I suppose he is very clever to have lived so long, and realized so little. Women are never in anything else but an intermediate stage. That sounds funny, but it's true. They are always going up, or coming down. Of course, I mean real women, not pre-Victorian survivals. The best woman in the world has bad streaks, but she won't admit it. The worst woman has good streaks, but she doesn't advertise."

She spoke rapidly and restlessly, watching Ward's face. He stood quite still, waiting.

"You don't help me much," she said. Then the feeling of futility passed. She was silent, in her turn, for a little while. At last, quite composedly, she asked:

"Will you tell me the true cause of Harold Thorpe's death?"

"Heart failure, due to a sudden shock."

"I thought he was stronger," she said; and added: "He was my husband."

Ward nodded.

"Yes."

"You knew?" she asked, but without surprise.

"Yes; I knew."

"I wonder," she said, "whether there are any papers or photographs that might connect me publicly with Harold?"

"I don't think you need worry," he said.

"Perhaps you consider me selfish," she said. "You may wonder why I do not show more emotion. Harold has been dead to me for a long time. Indeed, he never lived. I did not love him. I loved something that my imagination created. But that something never had any existence apart from my imagination. The actual reality was very different, and very distressing."

"You did not get a divorce?" he asked.

"No."

"Why not?"

She did not answer his question. He remembered that she was a Catholic.

"Well, you have your divorce now," he said. "Final and unrestricted."

"Yes," she said. "I am free now."

He looked down upon her. The words irritated him, yet he could see in them a deeper meaning than the obvious one. After all, she had not drawn much,

so far, from life's lottery: a loveless marriage with an old man, and then a marriage of a moment with a careless libertine. Her girlhood had been fettered by poverty and narrow duties. She had been governed by dwarfing conventions which hedged the letter of the moral law with a false divinity, and ignored the spirit. Was it strange if she had been perplexed later, finding her own moods more beautiful than those early codes? It was time that she began to feel free at last, knowing the realities of good and evil, and walking in the path that she herself had chosen and desired. And yet, was there any real freedom? Could human will ever escape completely from inherited shackles, conquer environment and habit, and mould a new destiny?

"You have a curious trick of looking right through people," she said. "What is it you see? the future?"

"Not always the future," he answered. "Sometimes, the past, and sometimes, nothing."

"You are a strange man," she said. "I have always known that. You frighten me, and yet you hold me. I cannot get away from you. God knows, I don't want to. I came to you to-night because I could n't wait. I want to know what my life is going to be. I have heard people talking about you, wherever I went; talking of this strange gift of yours. James told me all about the explosion at the pit. I have never known anyone so moved.

He said the men at the pit could n't forget your face. There was a light on it." She stopped, and then — "Oh, my dear!" she said, "can't you see what it all means to a woman? I have loved you from the beginning. Loved you, and been afraid of you. Loved you because I was afraid of you, perhaps. You were so still and strong. You had strange ways. You talked of the past and the future, and I did not know what you meant. And now you seem like a prophet or a saint, and yet you are not weak or womanish. Just a man. You 're not the monkish type; the old type I could never come near to; meek and holy and unsexed. You can be harsh and cruel. You have passions, needs, humanness. You understand the devil, and yet you walk with God. — Oh, my dear!" she cried: "what are you going to do with me? I want you. I cannot do without you. And once you seemed to love me. Did n't you? Was it a mistake? Or were you afraid of something? Did you see something, with that terrible gift of yours? What was it that you spoke about by the lake at Daventry? Darkness, you said, and lights that went out. And that strange dream afterwards — the night that you called me, and I seemed to come to you. Wanted to come to you. The strange room — and then the darkness. Always, the darkness! What does it mean? Tell me."

As he stood and looked at her, all the passion

that had drawn him toward her from their first meeting, flamed in him again, intense and urgent. It seemed futile to resist an attraction so overwhelming, based on some fundamental correspondence of their natures. Was he to struggle always, and always, in the end, surrender — incapable of the simple, unswerving resolution of a man like Morrison? Destiny or chance, prevision or delusion — could he even now distinguish with certainty between them?

Eternity seemed to spread sections before him, and mock him with the moment. The life of man was one drop of rain. Did it count in the flowing river twisting forward to the sea?

"Yes," he said. "It counts. Counts forever."

He had spoken aloud. She looked at him wonderingly.

"What counts?"

"Everything," he answered. "You and I. The moment. The past. The future."

"Can't we make our own future?" she asked.

"We are going to," he said. "Child, you and I must begin to be grown up. We can't be children always. We must live the grown-up life."

"I want to," she said. "A bigger and more beautiful life than I ever used to dream of. That is why I came to you — a woman to her lover. For I am grown up at last. I don't want to explain away the past, or to excuse it, or to forget

it. I know I have not been normal. I know I am not normal now. I don't wish to be normal. I wish to be myself, always, but the best self, not the worst self. And even at my worst, I think I have been better than many women who live perfectly respectable lives and tell perfectly respectable lies; women who imagine they have not done things because they will not admit having done them; who cheat themselves even in their thoughts — afraid to recognize their own natures, their own desires, their own passions. I have been frank with myself. That is all. Is it a very terrible thing?"

"We must not evade the issue," he said. "We may be frank with ourselves. We may despise the small deceptions. We may see far and clearly. But we are decadent — you and I."

"Decadent?" she repeated. "You said that once before, I remember — that I was decadent." She spoke simply, without anger or resentment.

"We are both decadent," he said. "It does n't help us that thousands of others are worse than we are; have less grip; less intellect. If we are worth anything, we must be frank all through. It 's no good my telling myself that I have lived decently and done some work. It 's quite true. But there 's something else. I have to look underneath the surface — at the dreams, the passion, the fever. Other men have their rough times. But this is something different."

"You are sure?" she asked.

"I ought to know," he answered. "It's the devil of heredity. But in this case the name of the devil is Legion."

"And are there no angels?" she asked. "Surely, with your strange gift — seeing the future like a prophet of God — catching glimpses of the long-dead past — don't you feel that you outvalue the little men — that you are too big for rules and regulations and restrictions — that the good in you is far too vast to be buried by the evil?"

"I see what I know to be right," he answered. "I want to choose it — as Christ chose it, accepting the crucifixion of the humanity in him, beautiful as it was, for the sake of the something that was finer and more real."

"But I thought it was all discarded — this old asceticism, this denunciation of the flesh, this monkish self-scourging? It seems so false and futile to me, so cowardly."

"It is n't the flesh we denounce; it is the tainted flesh, the tainted brain. Did it ever occur to you that there was more than one meaning in the statement that Jesus belonged to the Royal House of David? The chroniclers bungled the genealogy, but they wanted to establish the fact. They did n't realize that the Messiah inherited the blood of David — the blood that was in Solomon — the blood that had coveted Bathsheba, and was to covet the Queen

of Sheba, and the daughter of Pharaoh, and many strange women . . . So, if you choose to read it, there was perhaps a double meaning in the story of the crucifixion."

"I don't believe it," she said. "I don't wish to believe it."

"It is only an idea," he said. "Let it pass."

"God meant us to live our own lives," she said. "We may be handicapped by the past. We may be tainted, as you call it. But we can rise beyond the handicap, beyond the taint. It is n't brave to fling oneself away because one's great-great-grandfather was wilful and wicked, or even because one has been wicked oneself. It is n't right. I don't care what tendencies we may have. We can overcome them."

"Perhaps," he said. "But I must accept for myself what I proclaim for others. I don't believe that the vicious should perpetuate themselves — the criminal, the imbecile, the diseased. We may not like it, but we might not like being born Hottentots, or pigs. We have to accept our nature: make the best of it, of course, but accept it. The world is going to the devil, through sentimentality, self-pity, self-excusing, self-exemption. Some of us have to do the right thing, even if we pay a price that seems unfair."

"But why should we always look back or forward? Cannot we take something on trust? You

have talked of Christ. Did n't he say, 'Take no thought for the morrow. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof'?"

"I know," he said. "I know. But when the night comes — and the darkness?"

"Always the darkness!" she said. "Why do you repeat the word? What is it that you have seen?"

He did not answer. She rose, and came to him.

"Oh, my dear!" she said. "Tell me. I want to know everything. I 'm not afraid. I only want to know. Tell me what it is that has happened in the past — if anything has happened. Tell me what it is that is waiting in the future. I don't care. Nothing matters — but you. Why won't you answer? Am I so terrible to you? — Dear, I love you so much, so very much. I don't think anyone in the world has ever been loved as I love you. If you are afraid of me, and afraid of yourself — is n't there something that we can do? Can't we rise beyond this destiny that glowers at us — beyond ourselves — and find out something that is different from the little everyday life, bigger and better and finer? I don't want the ordinary life. I will give up all that most people mean by love. But I want to be near you always; to feel that I belong to you; that you love me and want me and are glad to have me. Oh, my dear, this is bigger and better than I am. I am lost in it. It carries me away.

I can see only beauty — loveliness everywhere, flooding the world. Dear, there is a mystery in sex. We know there is. It pervades the universe. Is n't it vaster and more wonderful than our little thoughts have imagined it? Our foolish customs and habits and conventions have only touched the fringe of it. Can't we give up the outside things, and take the things that matter — the spirit of love, the soul, the essence? "

" I believe that some men and women could do it," he answered. " They could give up the symbols, and retain the reality. They could live together and find the ideal of love in complete comradeship. Sex is bigger than sexuality. But we could n't do it. At any rate, I could n't. I 'm three-quarters animal. I don't condemn the animal. I like it, in its proper place. But mine is n't the right kind of animalism. It 's wrong. Altogether wrong."

" Can't we try? " she asked. " Even if we fail — would it matter very much? "

" Please sit down," he said. " Yes, it would matter. It has mattered before, and it will matter again and forever. We 've got to break out of the habit of giving way."

" There 's something you have n't told me," she said. " Something that frightens you — for my sake; not your own. You 'd take the risk then. Any man would. Please tell me. There was a dream — a vision, or something. Lights, and then

darkness. I want to know. You 've no right to send me away, and keep the truth from me. What is it? Are you afraid I should change? Or drag you down? Or that you would drag me down?" She watched his eyes. "You are afraid you would hurt me. Is that it? Ah, I can see! What was it that came to me that strange night, when you put your will into me? What was it? You hurt me. Yes. In the darkness. Is that it? You are afraid you would hurt me — kill me perhaps? As if that mattered! Dear, if I 've only been with you, I don't care what happens." She laughed, leaning against him, pressing him to her.

The room grew dark to him. He could see nothing; hear only a sound of breathing. Then he felt his fingers on her throat.

As the mist cleared from his eyes, he thought he had killed her.

"You frightened me," she said. "You press so hard — No, no. I don't mean frightened. But I did n't understand — "

His arms were round her neck. He drew her to him, and held her, crushing her until she bit her lips.

Abruptly, he released her, almost pushing her away.

"I want you to go now," he said.

"No!" she cried, and clung to him.

He unloosed her arms. "Yes. You must go."

"But I may come back?"

"Why make it harder?" he said. "I want you to go."

"Away from you altogether? Forever out of your life?"

"Yes," he said.

She was going to speak again, but saw his face was white and strained. She realized that he was fighting with himself.

"Please go," he said.

"I don't understand," she said. "It doesn't seem necessary, or right. Just cruel."

"Please go," he repeated.

"Why have you changed?" she cried. "You were so different at first, at Daventry."

"I didn't realize then," he said. "I didn't know."

"You have seen something," she said. "You have seen the future — as you foresaw the explosion at the pit. You have seen the end of all our dreams."

Her eyes were haunted with a vision of darkness.

"Yes," he said. "I have seen something."

"Too terrible to be faced?" she asked.

"Too terrible to be remembered," he said.

She came to him. "Kiss me," she said.

He kissed her.

She turned and went toward the door, slowly. Her head was bent. She fumbled at the knob.

He walked across the room and opened the door. She did not look at him, or at Harrington, waiting in the surgery.

"I will send you home in the car," he said.

She did not thank him; did not speak while they waited for Marple; did not say good-night as she was driven away.

CHAPTER X

WARD went back into the house, and into his study. He did not notice at first that his grandfather still occupied one of the easy chairs.

"You seem disturbed," the old man said. "Nothing unpleasant, I hope? But your face has the peculiar pallor that one would associate with a detected murderer."

"I am a murderer," Ward answered quietly. "I have murdered my children — for their own sakes."

"What do you mean?" the old man asked. "What's the matter? Dear God, is something always happening in this neighbourhood?"

"It's bedtime," Ward said. "Where is Philpotts?" He rang the bell.

"It is scarcely decent that one should be sent to bed by one's grandson," Lord Daventry complained. "It is peculiarly indecent that one should be sent to bed without receiving the explanation of a very strange remark. Children? I don't understand."

"Don't worry," Ward said. "They won't bother you. You'll never see them."

Philpotts announced himself with a tap that seemed to follow him.

Lord Daventry glanced at his grandson, shrugged his shoulders, and rose.

"Good-night," he said. "I would say God bless you — but it sounds sentimental." He looked very old as he went out.

Ward sat down at his desk and worked for an hour, answering letters, making notes in his case-book, and checking accounts. It was midnight when he went to bed.

He was tired, but could not sleep. He tried not to consider his recent action. It was past, finished. Yet he could not dismiss the subject. Had he acted sanely, or stupidly?

He reviewed his own life. It seemed that he had not done badly. At least, he had not drifted. The very neighbourhood in which he lived was a witness to will-power, to stability of purpose.

Had he misunderstood his own character; magnified the normal into the abnormal? Was he in reality different from other men?

Looking through himself, he watched the Beast within; the thing he had fought with; the thing that he was.

He heard a dog barking, somewhere in the direction of Newchurch. Then came faint sounds from the Chayle colliery.

His mind began to drift. He saw a great wheel,

like the wheel at the colliery. He watched it grow until it dominated the sky — a black rainbow in a night of stars. It began to revolve — the lower half lost in the earth-shadows. Bound on the wheel were forms of men and women. He saw them carried to the stars, and then down to the dust.

It seemed to him that he saw endless revolutions; watched innumerable lives.

The barking of the dog recalled him to wakefulness. The wheel of destiny disappeared.

He thought of his own strange experiences, culminating in the colliery warning. However others might try to explain them, he knew that he himself could not account for them on what would be considered normal grounds. The conviction of a knowledge beyond temporal knowledge, of worlds within worlds, and worlds beyond worlds, established itself impregnably. Yet these incidents, which had affected him so strongly, were utterly dwarfed by the miracles of common life: only a God could have devised an earthworm or a stone. Yes, God existed — throned in a remote star, or conceived as the everlasting root and substance of the universe. And whether He blamed or pitied; punished in His hells, or rewarded in His heavens, or rested divinely indifferent, leaving to lesser wills the intimate ordering of events — man must follow the ideal of duty and fitness.

Whatever else these premonitions and previsions

might mean, they proved at least, to him, that the control of life was not based on a vague, impersonal development. Humanity had importance, and was regulated by a power which, however suprahuman, could be known in degree, and comprehended in degree, by men. The whole scheme of existence was not fortuitous. Every detail had value. Conduct was not an affair of individual preference. It was concerned with the final end.

The face of the woman he desired came to him, objectively. He looked into the eyes.

She was decadent, as he was decadent. Their blood was tainted.

He seemed to look back through an endless cycle of centuries; yet always he was looking into the eyes of this woman, eyes which became magnified grotesquely, until they streamed like meteors through a firmament of time. He struggled to escape from them, and, as he struggled, saw himself through all the ages, fighting, but not winning. God! at whatever cost, he must break that endless chain of years, and hide those eyes in the darkness.

Quivering, he came back to half consciousness. He tried to remember something that he had forgotten. It eluded him. He strained to grasp it.

Darkness. He saw himself, as he had seen himself before. He was asleep. He dreamed that she was lying by his side — this woman whom he had known from the beginning of time. She had leaned

very close to him; had whispered to him of a new life stirring within her. And he had drawn her close, and kissed her, and so at last she had fallen asleep. But he had remained awake, staring at the ceiling, where shadows flickered. And then he too had fallen asleep, and dreamed. And in his dream he had walked to and fro, watching the Beast within him; the Beast that snarled and grinned. He had tried to throttle it, but it had leaped away from him, mocking him. He thought of the new life that was coming; saw a little form, relaxed, with tiny closed fingers. This is my son, he thought, his heart stirring. He looked intently, and saw that the Beast, whose name was Legion, had already occupied that frail tenement, and grinned at him, baring its teeth. His face became rigid. There must be no new life, no little form with the taint of devils. He stretched out his hands, and caught the Beast, choking it. It tore him, but he tightened his grip. And he dreamed that he woke from his dream; and by his side was a dead woman, with the marks of strangling fingers on her throat.

It was some time before he could throw off the weight of that nightmare. Was it warning, or prophecy, or merely the invention of a brooding mind? And yet, once before it had come to him, in that night of strange dreams at Daventry. And he had learnt beyond all doubting since then, that these previsions always found exact fulfilment.

And yet — how could the future be fixed? If he himself had power to choose now, how could he lose the power to choose again, if need were? How could fate be inexorable, unchangeable? His grandfather was right. Probabilities only could be foreseen, not inevitabilities. Nothing was inevitable.

Half asleep, he shook his head. Rather, everything was inevitable. When the first step had been taken, the last was assured.

With his eyes shut, he gazed steadily into the darkness of the night. And slowly, a message symbolled itself, as with vast letters on a pyramid.

Right or wrong, man must live up to the best — not the Beast — that was in him. He must justify his vision of life, so far as he could see it, and make — not accept — destiny.

He knew what was involved in living alone: the incompleteness, the semi-sterilization of effort; the unfilled days, the vacant nights.

Well, he would have his work. He could help things forward a little. The rest was his own affair.

And she —?

She must grapple with her own problem. Man had taken much from woman, for his lust and his desire and his love. But he had given more, pretending when illusion was gone; yielding to her weakness, as to a child's; deceiving her, for her

vanity's sake; killing his soul, that her body might live.

Half consciously, he stretched out his arms.

He was utterly tired. A weight was on his eyes. As he drifted into sleep, he seemed to hear thinly, from a distance, the blare of a steam siren, calling labourers to their toil in the early morning. Dreamily, he felt his kinship with those who do things, walking steadfastly in a known path, and fulfilling a purpose, whether in the making of pots or the hewing of coal. These were but symbols of the supreme necessity — achievement.

Through deeds, and the striving for knowledge, comes ripeness. And ripeness is all.

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